

interzone/99

£2.75

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

September
1995

Christopher Priest

story & interview

plus stories by

Darrell Schweitzer

Brian Stableford

Scott Baker

Don Webb



NOMINATED FOR
THE HUGO AWARD



O

R

B

I

T

FOR OUTSTANDING SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

Let the Dragon ride again on
the winds of time...

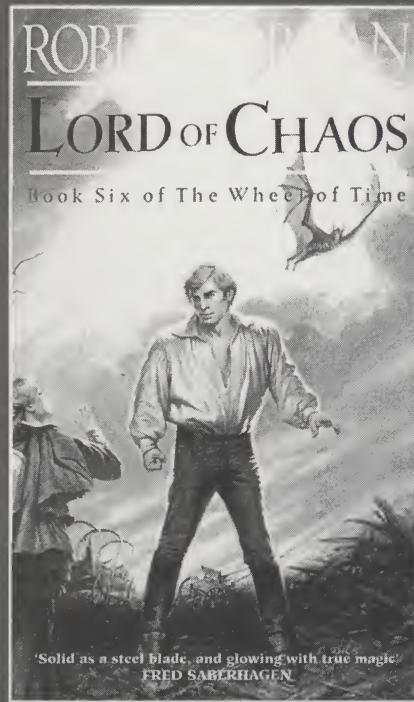
LORD OF CHAOS

Book Six of the bestselling
Wheel of Time series

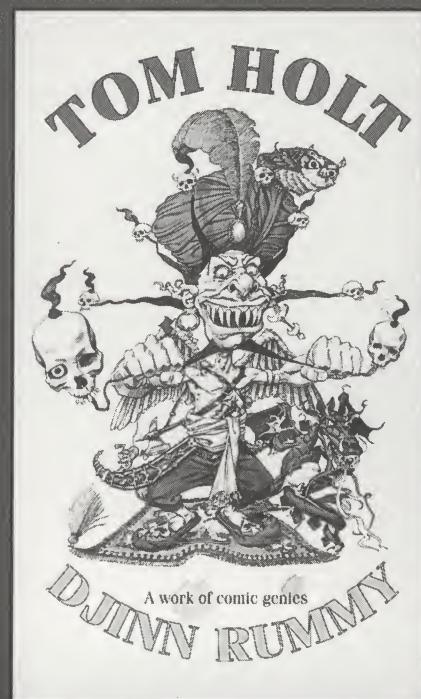
ROBERT JORDAN

'High fantasy that demands
to be taken seriously ...
a pleasure to read'

NEW STATESMAN & SOCIETY



DJINN
RUMMY
A work of comic genies from
TOM HOLT



If you haven't read any Tom Holt yet...
go out and buy one now...
but don't blame me for any
laughter-induced injuries!

VECTOR

And don't miss TOM HOLT'S
ODDS AND GODS
Now available in paperback

Editor & Publisher
David Pringle
Deputy Editor
Lee Montgomerie
Assistant Editors
Paul Annis,
Andy Robertson,
Andrew Tidmarsh
Consultant Editor
Simon Ounsley
Advisory Editors
John Clute,
Malcolm Edwards,
Judith Hanna

Graphic Design and Typesetting
Paul Brazier
Subscriptions Secretary
Ann Pringle
Circulation Advisers
The Unlimited Dream Company

Interzone
217 Preston Drove, Brighton BN1 6FL,
United Kingdom.

All subscriptions, back-issue orders,
general correspondence, books for
review, and enquiries about advertising
should be sent to this address.

Subscriptions:
£30 for one year (12 issues) in the UK.

Cheques or postal orders should be
crossed and made payable to *Interzone*.

Overseas subscriptions are £36,
payable by International Money Order.

Payments may also be made by
MasterCard, Visa or Eurocard: please
send your cardholder's name, initials
and address written in block letters,
with card number, card expiry date and
signature. (Note: overseas payments will
be charged at the £ sterling rate.)

Alternatively, American subscribers
may pay by dollar check, drawn on a
U.S. bank, at \$56. (All copies to other
continents are sent by Air Saver, i.e.
accelerated surface mail.).

Lifetime subscriptions:
Lifetime subscriptions: £300 (UK);
£360 (overseas); \$560 (USA).

Back-issues
of *Interzone* are available at £2.75 each
in the UK
(£2.80 each overseas), postage included.

(US dollar price: \$5 Air Saver.)
All issues are in print except numbers

1-2, 4-9, 12, 15-18, 20-24.

Order them from the address above.

Submissions:
stories, in the 2,000-6,000 word range,
should be sent singly and each one
must be accompanied by a stamped
self-addressed envelope of adequate
size. Persons overseas please send a
disposable manuscript (marked as
such) and two International Reply
Coupons. *We are unable to reply to
writers who do not send return postage.*

No responsibility can be accepted for
loss or damage to unsolicited material,
howsoever caused. Submissions should
be sent to the Brighton address above.

interzone

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 99

September 1995

CONTENTS

Fiction

6 CHRISTOPHER PRIEST
In a Flash

Illustrations by Gerry Grace

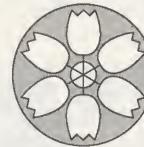


21 BRIAN STABLEFORD
The Serpent

Graphic by Paul Brazier

27 DON WEBB
The Flower Man

Graphic by Paul Brazier



37 DARRELL SCHWEITZER
The Giant Vorviades

44 SCOTT BAKER
Full Fathom Deep

Illustrations by Russell Morgan



Cover by Maurizio Manzieri

Published monthly. All material is © *Interzone*, 1995, on behalf of the various contributors

ISSN 0264-3596

Printed by KP Litho Ltd, Brighton

Trade distribution: Diamond Magazine Distribution Ltd.,
Unit 7, Rother Ironworks, Fishmarket Road, Rye,
East Sussex TN31 7LR (tel. 01797 225229).

Bookshop distribution: Central Books,
99 Wallis Rd., London E9 5LN (tel. 0181 986 4854).

Features

4 INTERACTION
Readers' Letters

18 CHRISTOPHER PRIEST
interviewed by
Alan Roche



32 NICK LOWE AND
NEIL JONES

Mutant Popcorn
Film and TV Reviews



36 DAVID LANGFORD
Ansible Link

53 DAVID PRINGLE
Imaginary People

55 CHRIS GILMORE, JAMES
LOVEGROVE, PETE
CROWTHER, BRIAN STABLEFORD,
PAUL BEARDSLEY, Book Reviews

Interface

Does anyone remember the western? You know: pioneers and mountain men, buffalo hunters and outlaws, sodbusters and gold-prospectors, stagecoach drivers and pony-express riders, gamblers and schoolmarm; folks in covered wagons crossing the unspoiled wilderness of 19th-century America; cowboys on horseback, fighting off Red Indians; men in hats duelling with sixguns outside the swing-doors of small-town saloons. The reason I ask is because the western's fate as a popular genre of fiction may have some bearing on the fate of science fiction, with its quite different imagery of bug-eyed monsters and superweapons, robots and spaceships, alien planets, time machines, biospheric disasters, otherworldly societies and future cities.

It occurred to me recently, while browsing through a reprint of Edward Buscombe's *The BFI Companion to the Western* and one or two other books, that the western is almost exactly forty years older than science fiction – and that the histories of the two fields parallel each other in many ways. If the "shapes" of their careers as genres are congruent, then in the history of the last forty years of the western we may see the outlines of science fiction's future. What will happen to sf in the four decades to come may be very similar to what has happened to the western in the four decades just past.

The Shapes of Genres

Allow me to explain briefly why I see the two fields as similar in shape. James Fenimore Cooper (*The Pioneers* [1823], *The Last of the Mohicans* [1826]) was to the western what Jules Verne (*Journey to the Centre of the Earth* [1864], *From the Earth to the Moon* [1870]) was to science fiction: its first great practitioner and its initial creative force. Of course, we all know that the term "science fiction" did not exist in the 1860s when Verne began writing his *voyages extraordinaires* – but nor did the term "western" exist forty years earlier when Cooper began writing his Leatherstocking Tales. Both writers inspired a host of imitators, and it was in that process of emulation and variation that the respective genres gradually emerged.

The founding fathers of the two genres gained some literary esteem, as well as enormous international success in a more commercial sense. Some of their immediate followers shared in that esteem and success. But then a curious thing happened to both genres: they went underground, and became "invisible" to middle-class literary

taste. In the case of the western (born in the 1820s), this began to happen in the 1860s, with the invention of a new cheap format of fiction-publishing for a mainly working-class and juvenile readership – the so-called dime novel (paper-covered booklets or pamphlets issued on a weekly or monthly basis). In the case of science fiction (born in the 1860s), it began to happen in the opening decades of the 20th century with the invention of another new fiction-publishing format – the pulp magazine (thick magazines with spines, printed on the cheapest available paper). The western disappeared into the dime novels and wandered in that wilderness for forty years, during which many of its hardiest conventions and clichés were formulated; and likewise science fiction disappeared into the pulps for a similar period of time, during which it too gathered most of its accretion of stock images and formulae.

But both genres were to have a literary heyday, when they emerged once more into the sun of middle-class acceptance – and, again, those glory days were, roughly speaking, forty years apart. With the western, this happened in the 1910s and 1920s, with the arrival of best-selling writers such as Clarence E. Mulford (*Hopalong Cassidy*, 1910), Zane Grey (*Riders of the Purple Sage*, 1912) and Max Brand (*The Untamed*, 1918) – Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902) had been a slightly earlier sign of respectability. It is to this period that the very term "western," as a label for a widely-recognized type of popular fiction, belongs; and this process of naming is one reason why some people say (erroneously) that the western "began" with *The Virginian*.

Science fiction's comparable heyday was in the 1950s and 1960s, when writers such as Heinlein and Asimov, Bradbury and Sturgeon, Wyndham and Clarke, all emerged from the pulps to the new honour of hardcover publication and respectful newspaper reviews. The term "science fiction" (soon followed by its ugly contraction "sci-fi") first became common currency in the early 1950s. (It had been in use among pulp fans before that date, but went unrecognized by a more general public – see Damon Knight's introduction to his anthology *A Century of Science Fiction* for more on this point.) Just as the western had been the "in" genre of the 1910s, with Zane Grey, for example, far outselling his contemporary Edgar Rice Burroughs, so science fiction became the in-thing of the 1950s, in book form at any rate: it was perceived as being new, young, vital, full of promise, the "literature of the future."

The Dominance of Film and TV
Meanwhile, the western, after enjoying its long summer of the 1920s, 30s and 40s, entered a new phase in the 1950s (at the same moment science fiction was experiencing its first publishing boom). What happened then was that the western became primarily a *cinematic* form. Of course, there had been many, many western movies before 1950, but the vast bulk of them had been cheaply-made "oaters," series B-movies of small consequence – horse operas, in fact. What was new in the 1950s was the coming of the screen "super-western": *High Noon*, *Shane*, *The Searchers*, *The Big Country*, *The Magnificent Seven* and numerous other films which were among the most respected of their day (and among the highest grossers). To film critics, it is a statement of the obvious to say that the 1950s was the Decade of the Western.

And the western's success on the big screen was soon followed by a stampede of television examples of the form – *Gunsmoke*, *Cheyenne*, *Wagon Train*, *Rawhide*, *Bonanza*, *The Virginian* (pale shadow of Wister's original) and literally scores of other westerns thundered across the world's TV screens, lasting well into the 1960s and 70s. Throughout this film-and-TV-dominated phase new westerns continued to be published in book form as well, but a growing percentage of these books were spinoffs of one kind or another – a good example is the "Dollars" series of paperback originals, inspired by the Clint Eastwood spaghetti westerns of the 1960s, which in turn inspired the lengthy "Edge" series by G. G. Gilman (British author Terry Harknett) and others of its ilk. This period can be seen as an Indian summer for western writers – so long as they were willing to emulate what they and their public saw on the screen (large or small).

So, if the print western enjoyed a 1910s and 20s heyday, followed by a 1930s and 40s high summer, followed by a 1950s and 60s autumn during which it became overshadowed by other media, can we draw the same chart for science fiction, simply by shifting all the dates forty-or-so years further forward in time? I believe we can. If the 1950s represent the sf genre's heyday, then, by this logic, the 1990s should represent the onset of its autumnal phase, when its printed forms have become secondary to its film and TV forms. In other words, science fiction in the 1990s may be in much the same position that the western was in the 1950s. Indeed, since *Star Wars*, sf movies have become more and more dominant – the *Aliens* films, the *Back to the Future* movies, the *Terminator* films, and so on (Kubrick's *2001* [1968], was a harbinger, just as Ford's *Stagecoach* [1939] was a forerunner of the "super-westerns" that would come in the 1950s). Moreover, sf television is

now gaining full strength, what with the plethora of *Star Trek* spinoffs, *Quantum Leap*, *Babylon 5*, *The X-Files* and other successful shows. Already one senses that there is a younger generation for whom science fiction means film-and-TV sf before it means books or other written forms. And an ever-greater proportion of the sf books which do get published, and enjoy sales, are movie or TV spinoffs.

The End

In the 1970s and 80s, all of a sudden (as it seemed), there were no more western series on TV – and precious

few western movies in the cinemas. In Britain, the western novel died, quite abruptly, in the mid-1980s (for example, Angus Wells, who had written scores of them under pseudonyms, woke up one day in 1984 to discover that he had no more commissions; that's why he started to write fantasy, and it's also why his colleague John Harvey turned to crime fiction). A few genre westerns continue to be published in the USA, but for the most part the western novel exists now only in its handful of "mainstream" examples: Larry McMurtry writes the occasional blockbuster such as *Lonesome Dove* or *Streets of Laredo*,

and wins Pulitzer Prizes, but these are not published as genre works. It's the same with films: the occasional *Dances With Wolves* or *Unforgiven* may scoop an Oscar, but there are no more run-of-the-mill western movies (or TV shows), just as there are no more mid-list western novels. The western, as a widely popular genre which once supported many hundreds of writers and film-makers, is dead.

Will it be the same for science fiction thirty or forty years from now – or even sooner?

David Pringle

Interaction

Letters edited by Paul Brazier

DP being busy with editorial and other projects has left the letters to me. All editorial responses are mine. PB

Dear Editors,

I had expected Nick Lowe to come in for some criticism for his review of *Star Trek: Generations* but I was disappointed that the two letters you did print were of the *Star Trek* anorak variety. I have subscribed to *Interzone* for long enough to realise that most of your reviewers have strong, personal and informed views which are sometimes forcefully put. Nick Lowe let us all down with a sloppy review – if he was not familiar with the canon then why not discuss the film as a standalone science fiction film. I am, though not a fanatic, nevertheless familiar with the characters and their universe and it was difficult for me to decide how good or bad the film was – I suspect the latter.

And then Gary Dalkin adds insult to injury with his review of *Babylon 5*. I watch B5 regularly and it is ahead of any TV science fiction I have seen – largely because, although each episode is largely self-contained, there is an overall development of the main plot throughout. It may be watered-down SF and completely embarrassing in parts but it is the best we have in a field that includes the forgettable *Dataman* and *Seaquest DSV*. We must hope that Mr Straczynski can see the whole thing through to its conclusion.

I must say that SF is for books – not TV or film or comics. It really doesn't – or can't – work in any medium other than the written word.

And now the main point. Here is my subscription for the next 12 issues – please keep on doing what you do so well.

Paul Garbett
North Berwick

I have to admit to being astonished by Nick Lowe's review when I typeset it. He not only did not know the context of the

story, but also signally failed to note that all of the strong female characters who feature in the TV series were at best sidelined and at worst ignored. Is Hollywood really so far behind the times?

I was also astonished that anyone could review *Babylon 5*. I found the first episodes so dull I simply gave up watching it. Whereas *Star Trek* continues to fascinate me all unwillingly – I don't have the time to watch TV at all. PB

Greetings O masters of the printed word. A way to increase your subscriptions by tenfold?

It came to me by way of serendipity as I lay upon my damask couch. Weeping for the long awaited return of my humble little manuscripts.

A vision of the *Interzone* slush pile reaching unto the very ceiling.

Let it be heard. Far and wide. That there is another slush pile, only inches high. Where sit in honoured isolation. Awaiting the immediate attention of the eagle-eyed editors. The manuscripts sent in by – subscribers. Surely this will result in a surge of gold to your needy coffers.

Whatever your response to this inspired, freely offered marketing strategy. I shall now pepper you with manuscripts, who's envelopes will be marked. Subscriber (98). For that is my delivery number. In the faint hope that, one day, my unconventional sense of humour will spark a response in one of your good selves.

Now that's off my substantial chest, I should like to state that Francis O'Regan's tale of desperate search in *Interaction* 97 is no tall story. But is most likely a cut-down version of the grim truth. I suffered the same long, hard search over two years ago.

Until, at last. In subterranean chambers beneath London's busy streets. I triumphantly clutched my first copy of *Interzone* in trembling hands.

Welcome to the club of desperate

endeavour Francis. Stay strong and true to the cause of looking at the world from an oblique angle.

Terry Lovesey

Somewhere in the shires.

Before it folded, *Nexus* actually operated this policy. It made no difference to finances or slushpile, so the money ran out, and one of my continuing tasks is responding properly to all the manuscripts still in the slushpile. Recently, I discovered one of Terry Lovesey's stories there. I was tickled by his humour and his idiosyncratic punctuation, but they haven't clicked with the *IZ* editors yet. Both he and I live in hope. PB

Dear Editors

As a latecomer (or should it be newcomer) to this country, I've been enjoying *Interzone* since issue 50. If I agreed about the quality of every story that appears I would start worrying about deterioration of my critical faculties. I must say however that it never fails to deliver stories that stimulate the imagination and challenge the intellect.

Nick Lowe is a priceless asset, delivering a well thought-out and superbly informed verdict (needless to say I don't always agree) and John Clute is hugely enjoyable (when his personal bias does not make him infuriating).

I already subscribe to far too many magazines to be always on time with my reading of *IZ* so I can't comment on individual stories without sounding like I've been caught in a back-issue timewarp, but what has kept me buying *IZ* month after month is the fact that in all this time not once did I feel that the magazine was growing stale or its editors complacent.

So keep those editorial instincts sharply honed and don't worry about the moaners. There is (to borrow a tired cliché) a silent majority that'll stay with you every step of the way.

David Amerland



8th July 1900

Denver, Colorado

In spite of the luxuries of American railroad travel, it is a blessing not to be travelling for the next day or two, because I plan to rest in this city before continuing my journey. This is the longest continuous break I have ever made from magic: no performances, no practising, no conferences with my *ingénieur*, no auditions or rehearsals.

To the east of Denver lies the great plain, across part of which I came while travelling from Chicago. All day yesterday a wind blew from the southeast, hot and dry and apparently laden with grit. The staff at the hotel complain that it is from the arid neighbouring states, like Oklahoma, but no matter what its source it meant that my explorations of the town were hot and unpleasant. I curtailed them and returned to the hotel. Later in the day, when it was cooler, I went out to the balcony of my room and watched the sun setting behind the stunning peaks of the Rocky Mountains.

10th July 1900

Colorado Springs, Colorado

This town is about seventy miles to the south of

Denver, but the journey has taken all day in a horse-drawn omnibus. It made frequent stops to take on and put down passengers, to change horses, to change drivers. I felt uncomfortable, prominent and travel-weary. My appearance was probably ridiculous, to judge by the expressions on the faces of the farming people who rode with me. However, I have arrived safe and sound, and am immediately charmed by the place in which I find myself. It is not anywhere near as large as Denver, but abundantly reveals the care and affection that Americans lavish on their small towns.

I have found a modest but attractive hotel, suitable for my needs, and because I liked my room on sight I have registered for a week's stay with an option to extend it if necessary.

From the window of my room I can see two of the three features of Colorado Springs that have brought me here.

The whole town dances with electric lights after the sun has set: the streets have tall lamps, every house has brightly illuminated windows, and in the "downtown" area, which I can see from my room, many of the shops, businesses and restaurants have



Illustrations by Gerry Grace

dazzling advertising signs that glisten and flash in the warm night.

Beyond them, bulking against the night sky, is the black mass of the famous mountain that stands beside the town: Pike's Peak, nearly 15,000 feet in height.

Tomorrow, I shall make my first ascent of the lower slopes of Pike's Peak, and seek out the third singular feature that has brought me to this town.

12th July 1900

I was too weary to write in my diary yesterday evening, and I have perforce to spend today alone here in the town, so I have plenty of opportunity to recount at leisure what transpired.

I was awake at an early hour, took my breakfast in the hotel, and walked quickly to the central square of the town where my carriage was supposed to be waiting for me. This was something I had arranged by letter before leaving London, and although everything had been confirmed at that time I had no way of knowing for sure that my man would be there for me. To my astonishment, he was.

In the casual American manner we quickly became great friends. His name is Randall D. Gilpin, a Col-

orado man born and bred. I call him Randy, and he calls me Robbie. He is short and round, with a great circling of grey whiskers about his cheerful face. His eyes are blue, his face is burned red ochre by the sun, and his hair, like the whiskers, is steel-grey. He wears a hat made of leather, and the filthiest trousers I have ever seen in my life. He has a finger missing from his left hand. He carries a rifle under the seat from which he drives the horses, and he told me he keeps it loaded.

The route to Nikola Tesla's laboratory is a steady climb of mixed gradients across the eastern face of the great mountain, the land densely wooded for the first mile or so as the lane wends its way out of the town, but soon thinning into rocky ground supporting immensely tall and well-spaced firs. The views to the east were vast, but the landscape in this region is so flat and uniformly used that there was virtually nothing scenic at which to marvel.

After an hour and a half we came to a plateau, on the northeast face of the mountain, and here no trees grew at all. I noticed many fresh stumps, indicating that what few trees had actually once grown here had been recently felled.

In the centre of this small plateau, and not nearly as

large as I had been led to believe, was Tesla's laboratory.

"You got business here, Robbie?" said Randy. "You watch how you go. It can get darn dangerous up here, from what folks say."

"I know the risks," I averred. I negotiated with him briefly, unsure of what arrangements, if any, Tesla himself had for descending to the town, and wanting to be sure that I could later get back to my hotel without difficulty. Randy told me that he had business of his own to attend to, but would return to the laboratory in the afternoon and wait for me until I appeared.

I noticed that he would not take the carriage too close to the building, and I had to walk the last four or five hundred yards by myself.

The laboratory was a square construction with sloping roofs, built with unstained or unpainted wood, showing many signs of impromptu decisions about its design. It appeared that various small extensions had been added after the main structure went up, because the roofs were not all at the same pitch, and in places met at odd angles. A large wooden derrick had been built on (or through) the main roof, and another, smaller rig had been built on one of the side sloping roofs.

In the centre of the building, rising vertically, was a tall metal pole that tapered gradually to what would have been a point, although there was no visible apex because at the top there was a large metal sphere. This was glinting in the bright morning sunshine, and waving gently to and fro in the fresh breeze that was blowing along the mountainside.

On each side of the path a number of technical instruments of obscure purpose had been set on the ground. There were many metal poles driven into the stony soil, and most of these were connected to each other with insulated wires. Close by the side of the main building was a wooden frame with a glass wall, inside which I saw several measuring dials or registers.

I heard a sudden and violent crackling sound, and from within the building there came a series of brilliant and horrific flashes: white, blue-white, pink-white, repeated erratically but rapidly. So fierce were these explosions of light that they glared not only at the one or two windows in my sight, but revealed the tiny cracks and apertures in the fabric of the walls.

I confess that at this moment my resolve briefly failed, and I even glanced back to see if Randy and his carriage were still within hailing distance. (No sign of him!) My faint heart became even fainter when, within two or three more steps, I came upon a hand-painted sign mounted on the wall beside the main door. It said:

GREAT DANGER Keep Out!

As I read this the electric discharges from within died away as abruptly as they had started, and it seemed a positive omen. I banged my fist on the door.

After a wait of a few moments, Nikola Tesla himself opened the door. His expression was the abstracted one of a busy man who has been irritably interrupted. It was not a good start, but I

made the best of it.

"Mr Tesla?" I said. "My name is Rupert Angier. I wonder if you recall our correspondence? I have been writing to you from England."

"I know nobody in England!" He was staring behind me, as if wondering how many more Englishmen I had brought with me. "Say your name again, good sir?"

"My name is Rupert Angier. I was present at your demonstration in London, and was greatly interested –"

"You are the magician! The one Mr Alley knows all about?"

"I am the magician," I confirmed, although the meaning of his second query was for the moment lost on me.

"You may enter!"

So many impressions about him at once, of course reinforced by my having spent several hours with him after our first exchange. At the time I noticed his face first. It was gaunt, intelligent and handsome, with strong Slavic cheekbones. He wore a thin moustache, and his lanky hair was parted in the middle. His appearance was in general untended, that of a man who worked long hours and slept only when there was no alternative to exhaustion.

Inside the laboratory Tesla introduced me to his assistant, a Mr Alley. This interesting man appears to fulfil many rôles in Tesla's life, from scientific assistant and collaborator, to domestic servant and companion. Mr Alley declared himself to be an admirer of my work! He had been in the audience during my show in Kansas City in 1893, and spoke briefly but knowledgeably about magic.

By all appearances the two men work in the laboratory alone, with only the astonishing research equipment for company. I ascribe this near-human quality to the apparatus because Tesla himself has a habit of referring to his equipment as if it had thoughts and instincts. Once, yesterday, I heard him say to Alley, "It knows there's a storm coming"; at another moment he said, "I think it's waiting for us to start again."

Tesla interrogated me about the use of electricity in Britain, how widespread it was becoming, what was the British government's commitment to long-term generation and transmission of power, the kinds of transmission being envisioned and the uses to which it was being put. Because I had planned to have this meeting with Tesla, I had done my homework on the subject before leaving England and was able to converse with him on a reasonably informed level, a fact for which he seemed appreciative. He was especially gratified to learn that many British installations appeared to favour his polyphase system, which was not the case here in the USA. "Most cities still prefer the Edison system," he growled, and went into a technical exposition of the failings of his rival's methods. I sensed that he had rehearsed these sentiments many times in the past, and to listeners better equipped than I to take them in. The upshot of his complaint was that in the end people would come around to his alternating current sys-

tem, but that they were wasting a lot of time and opportunities while they did so. On this subject, and on several others related to his work, he sounded humourless and forbidding, but at other times I found him delightful and amusing company.

Eventually, the focus of his questions turned to myself, my career, my interest in electricity, and to what uses I might wish to put it.

I had resolved, before leaving England, that were Tesla to enquire into the secrets of my illusions he would be one person to whom I would make an exception and reveal anything in which he might show interest. It seemed only right. When I had seen his lecture in London he had had all the appearance of a member of my own profession, taking the same delight in surprising and mystifying the audience, yet, unlike a magician, being more than willing, anxious even, to reveal and share his secrets.

He turned out to be incurious, though. I sensed that nothing would be gained by my harking on the subject. Instead, I let him direct our conversation, and for an hour or two he rambled entertainingly over his conflicts with Edison, his struggles against bureaucracy and the scientific establishment, and most of all his successes. His present laboratory had been funded, in effect, by the work of the past few years. He had installed the first water-powered city-sized electricity generator in the world; the generating station was at Niagara Falls, and the beneficiary city was Buffalo. It is true to say that Tesla had made his fortune at Niagara, but like many men of sudden wealth he wondered how long he could make last what he had.

As gently as I could I kept the conversation centred on money, because this is one of the few subjects where our interests genuinely meet. Of course he would not impart details of his finances to me, a virtual stranger, but funding is clearly a preoccupation. He mentioned J. Pierpoint Morgan, his present sponsor, several times.

I have said little of the dominant feature of his laboratory. All through the long conversation we were overshadowed by the bulk of his Experimental Coil. Indeed, the entire laboratory can be said to be the Coil, for there is little else there apart from recording and calibrating apparatus.

The Coil is immense. Tesla said that it had a diameter in excess of fifty feet, which I can well believe. Because the interior of the laboratory is not brightly lit the Coil has a gloomy, mysterious presence, at least while it is not being used. Constructed around a central core (the base of the tall metal pole that I had seen protruding through the roof), the Coil is wound around numerous wooden and metal battens, in a complexity that increases the closer in to the core you explore. With my layman's eyes I could make no sense of its design. The effect was to a large extent that of a bizarre cage. Everything about it and around it seemed haphazard. For instance, there were several ordinary wooden chairs in the laboratory, and several of these were in the immediate vicinity of the Coil. As indeed were many other bits and pieces: papers, tools, scraps of dropped and forgotten food, even a grubby-looking kerchief. I duly marvelled at

the Coil when Tesla conducted me around it, but it was impossible for me then to understand any of it. All I grasped was that it was capable of using or transforming huge amounts of electricity. The power for it is sent up the mountain from Colorado Springs below; Tesla has paid for this by installing the town generators himself!

"I have all the electricity I want!" he said at one juncture. "As you will probably find during the evenings."

I asked him what he meant.

"You will notice that from time to time the town lights momentarily dim. Sometimes they even go off altogether for a few seconds. It means we are at work up here! Let me show you."

He led me out of the ramshackle building and across the uneven ground outside. After a short distance we came to a place where the side of the mountain dropped steeply away, and there, a long way below, was the whole extent of Colorado Springs, shimmering in the summer heat.

"If you come up here one night I'll demonstrate," he promised. "With a pull on one lever I can plunge that whole city into the dark."

As we headed back, he said, "You must indeed visit me one night. Night-time is the finest time in the mountains. As you have no doubt observed for yourself the scenery here is on a grand scale but intrinsically lacking in interest. To one side, nothing but rocky peaks; to the other, land as flat as the top of a table. It is a mistake to look down or around. The real interest is above us!" He gestured towards the sky. "I have never known such clarity of air, such moonlight. Nor have I ever seen such storms as occur here! I chose this site because of the frequency of storms. There is one coming at this moment, as it happens."

I glanced around me, looking for the familiar sight of the piling anvil-topped cloud in the distance, or, if closer, the black mass of rain-bearing cloud that darkens the sky in the minutes before a storm actually breaks, but the sky was an untrammelled blue in every direction. The air, too, remained crisp and lively, with no hint of the ominous sultriness that always presages a downpour.

"The storm will arrive after seven this evening. In fact, let us examine my coherer, from which we can ascertain the exact time."

We walked back to the laboratory. As we did so I noticed that Randy Gilpin and his carriage had arrived, and were parked well away from where we were. Randy waved to me, and I waved back.

Tesla indicated one of the instruments I had noted earlier.

"This shows that a storm is currently in the region of Central City, about 80 miles to the north of us. Watch!"

He indicated a part of the device that could be seen through a magnifying lens, and jabbed a finger at it at odd moments. After peering at it for a while I saw what he was trying to indicate – a tiny electrical spark was bridging the visible gap between two metal studs.

"Each time it sparks it is registering a flash of

lightning," Tesla explained. "Sometimes I will note the discharge here, and more than an hour later I will hear the thunder rumbling in from far away."

I was about to express my disbelief when I remembered the intense seriousness of the man. He had moved to another instrument, next to the coherer, and noted down two or three readings from it. I followed him to it.

"Yes," he said. "Mr Angier, would you be good enough to look at your timepiece this evening, and note the moment it happens to be when you see the first flash of lightning. By my calculation it should be between 7.15 p.m. and 7.20 p.m."

"You can predict the exact moment?" I said.

"Within about five minutes."

"Then you could make your fortune with this alone!" I exclaimed.

He looked uninterested.

"It is peripheral," he said. "My work is purely experimental, and my main concern is to know when a storm is going to break so that I might make the best use of it." He glanced over to where Gilpin was waiting. "I see your carriage has returned, Mr Angier. You plan to make another visit to see me?"

"I came to Colorado Springs for one reason only," I said. "That is so that I might put a business proposition to you."

"The best kind of proposition, in my experience," Tesla said gravely. "I shall expect you the day after tomorrow."

He explained that today was going to be taken up by a trip to the railhead to collect some more equipment.

With this I departed, and in due course returned with Gilpin to the town.

I must record that at exactly 7.19 p.m. there was a flash of lightning visible in the town, followed soon after by a crack of thunder. There then began one of the more spectacular storms it has been my lot to experience. During the course of it I ventured on to the balcony of my hotel room, and looked up at the heights of Pike's Peak for some glimpse of Tesla's laboratory. All was darkness.

13th July 1900

Today Tesla gave me a demonstration of his Coil in operation.

At the start he asked me if I was of a nervous disposition, and I said I was not. Tesla then gave me an iron bar to hold, one that was connected to the floor by a long chain. He brought to me a large glass dome, apparently filled with smoke or gas, and put it on the table before me. While I continued to hold the iron rod in my left hand, I placed, at his direction, the palm of my right hand against the glass chamber. Instantly, a brilliant light burst out inside the dome, and I felt every hair on my arm rise proud from my skin. I pulled back in alarm, and the light immediately vanished. Noticing Tesla's amused smile, I returned my hand to the glass and held it there steadily as the uncanny radiance burst forth once more.

There followed several more such experiments, some of which I had seen Tesla himself demonstrating in London. Determined not to reveal my nervous

feelings, I endured the electrical discharging of each piece of apparatus stoically. Finally, Tesla asked me if I should care to sit within the main field of his Experimental Coil while he raised its power to twenty million volts!

"Is it entirely safe?" I enquired, but jutting my jaw a little, as if I were accustomed to taking risks.

"You have my word, sir. Is this not why you have come to see me?"

"Indeed it is," I confirmed.

Tesla indicated I should sit on one of the wooden chairs, and I did so. Mr Alley also came forward. He was dragging one of the other chairs, and he placed it beside me and sat down. He handed me a sheet of newspaper.

"See if you can read by unearthly light!" he said, and both he and Tesla chuckled.

I was smiling with them as Tesla brought down a metal handle and with an ear-shattering crashing noise there was a sudden discharge of electrical power. It burst out from the coils of wire above my head, folding out like the petals of some vast and deadly chrysanthemum. I watched in stupefaction as these jerking, spitting electrical bolts curved first up and around the head of the coil, then began moving down towards Alley and myself, as if seeking us as prey. Alley remained still beside me, so I forced myself not to move. Suddenly, one of the bolts touched me, and ran up and down the length of my body as if tracing my outline. Again, my skin horripilated, and my eyes were scorched by the light, but otherwise there was no pain, no burning sensation, no feeling of electrical shock.

Alley indicated the newspaper I was still clutching, so I held it before me and discovered, sure enough, that the radiance from the electricity was more than bright enough to read by. As I held the page before me, two sparks ran across its surface, almost as if an attempt was being made to ignite the paper. Marvelously, miraculously, the page did not burn.

Afterwards, Tesla suggested I might like to take another short walk with him, and as soon as we were outside in the open air he said, "Sir, let me congratulate you. You are brave."

"I was determined not to show my true feelings," I demurred.

Tesla told me many visitors to his laboratory were offered the same demonstrations I had just seen, but that few of them seemed ready to submit themselves to the imagined ravages of electrical discharge.

"Maybe they have not seen your demonstrations," I suggested. "I know you would not risk your own life, nor indeed that of someone who has travelled all the way from Great Britain to make you a business offer."

"Indeed not," said Tesla. "Perhaps now is the time when we should quietly discuss business. May I beg details of what you have in mind?"

"This is what I am not entirely sure about —" I began, and paused, trying to formulate the words.

"Do you propose to invest in my researches?"

"No, sir, I do not," I was able to say. "I know that you have had many experiences with investors."

"That indeed I have. I am thought by some to be a difficult man to work with, and very little I have in mind is likely to turn a short-term profit for an investor. It is something that has in the past caused vexed relationships."

"And in the present too, may I dare to venture? Mr Morgan was clearly on your mind when we spoke the other day."

"Mr J.P. Morgan is indeed a current preoccupation."

"Then let me say candidly that I am a wealthy man, Mr Tesla. I hope I might be able to assist you."

"But not by investment, you say?"

"By purchase," I replied. "I wish you to build me an electrical apparatus, and if we can agree a price I shall gladly pay for it."

We had been strolling around the circumference of the cleared plateau on which the laboratory stands, but now Tesla came to a sudden halt. He struck a pose, staring thoughtfully towards the trees that covered the rising side of the mountain ahead of us.

"Which piece of apparatus do you require?" he said. "As you have seen my work is theoretical, experimental. None of it is for sale, and everything I am using at present is invaluable to me."

"Before I left England," I said, "I read an article about your work in *The Times*. In the article it was said that you had discovered on a theoretical basis that electricity might be transmitted through the air, and that you planned to demonstrate the principle in the near future." Tesla was watching me fiercely while I spoke, but having declared my interest to such an extent I had to go on. "Would this be true?"

I stared directly into Tesla's eyes as I asked this final question, and saw that another great change had come across his features. Now his expression and gestures became animated and expressive.

"Yes, it is entirely true!" he cried, and at once launched into a wild account of what he planned. Once thus begun he was unstoppable! He strode off in the direction we had been heading, speaking quickly and excitedly, making me trot to keep up with him. We were circling the laboratory at a distance, with the great balled spire constantly in view. Tesla gesticated towards it several times while he spoke.

The essence of what he said was that he had long ago established that the most efficient way of transmitting his polyphase electrical current was to boost it to high voltages and direct it along high-tension cables. Now he was able to show that if the current was boosted to an even greater voltage then it became of extremely high frequency, and no cables at all would be required. The current would be *sent out*, radiated, cast broadly into the aether, whereupon by a series of detectors or receivers the electricity could be captured once more and turned to use.

"Imagine the possibilities, Mr Angier!" Tesla declared. "Every appliance, every utility, every convenience known to man or imaginable by him will be propelled by electricity that emanates from the air!"

Tesla launched into a litany of possibilities: light, heat, hot-water baths, food, houses, amusements, automobiles ... all would be electrically powered in some mysterious and undescribed way.



"You have this working?" I asked.

"Without question! On an experimental basis, you understand, but the experiments are repeatable by others, should they bother to try, and they can be controlled. This is no phantasm! Within a few years I shall be generating power for the whole world in the way that at present I power the city of Buffalo!"

We had circled the large area of ground twice while this exposition poured out of him, and I kept my pace beside him, determined to let his scientific rapture run its course. Finally it did.

"Do I understand you wish to buy this apparatus from me, Mr Angier?" he said.

"No, sir," I replied. "I am here to ask for another purchase."

"I am fully engaged in the work I am describing!"

"I appreciate that, Mr Tesla. I am seeking something new. Tell me this: if electrical energy may be transmitted, could physical matter also be sent from one place to another?"

The steadiness of his answer surprised me. He said, "Energy and matter are but two manifestations of the same force. Surely you realize this?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"Then you already know the answer. Though I must add that I cannot see why anyone should wish to transmit matter."

"But could you make me the apparatus that would achieve this?"

"How much mass would be involved? What weight would there be? What size object?"

"Never more than two hundred pounds," I said. "And the size... let us say two yards in height, at most."

He waved a hand dismissively. "What sum are you offering me?"

"What sum do you require?"

"I desperately need 8,000 dollars, Mr Angier."

I could not prevent myself laughing aloud. It was more than I had planned, but still it was within my means. Tesla looked apprehensive, apparently thinking me mad, and backed away from me a little... but only a few moments later we were embracing on that windy plateau, clapping our hands against each other's shoulders, two needs meeting, two needs met.

As we drew apart, and clasped hands in contract together, a loud peal of thunder rang out somewhere in the mountains behind us, and rolled around us, rumbling and echoing in the narrow passes.

14th July 1900

Tesla drives a harder bargain than I had reckoned. I am to pay him not eight but *ten* thousand dollars, a small fortune by any standards. It seems he sleeps on important matters just like ordinary men, and awoke this morning with the realization that the \$8,000 would cover only the shortfall he was bearing before I arrived. My apparatus will cost more. Beside this, he has demanded that I pay him a goodly percentage in cash, and in advance. I have \$3,000 I can produce in cash, and can raise another three with the bearer bonds I have brought with me, but the remainder will have to be sent from England.

Tesla agreed promptly to the arrangement.

Today he has quizzed me more closely about what I require of him. He is incurious about the magical effect I plan to achieve, but is concerned instead with practicalities. The size of the apparatus, the source of power for it, the weight it will need to be, the degree of portability required.

I find myself admiring his analytical mind. Portability was one aspect I had not thought about at all, but of course this is a critical factor for a touring magician.

He has already drawn up rough plans, and has banished me to the distractions of Colorado Springs for two days, while he visits Denver to acquire the constituent parts. But he works slowly! I am anxious about the passage of time. Naively I had thought that once I commissioned him it would be a matter of hours before he produced the mechanism I required. I see, by the abstracted expression he bears as he mutters to himself, that I have started a process of invention that might know no practical end. (In an aside, Mr Alley confirmed that Tesla sometimes worries at a problem for months.)

I have firm bookings in England in October and November, and must be home well before the first of them.

21st July 1900

Tesla's work apparently proceeds well. I am allowed to visit his laboratory every two days, and although I have seen something of the apparatus there has been no question yet of a demonstration. Today I found him tinkering with his research experiments. He seemed abstracted by them and was partly irritated and partly puzzled to see me.

4th August 1900

Violent thunderstorms have been playing around Pike's Peak for three days, casting me into gloom and frustration. I know that Tesla will be involved with his own experiments, not with mine.

The days are slipping by. I must be on the train out of Denver before the end of this month!

8th August 1900

Tesla told me on my arrival at the laboratory this morning that my apparatus was ready for demonstration, and in a state of great excitement I readied myself to see it. When it came to it, though, the thing refused to function, and after I had watched Tesla fiddling with some of the wiring for more than three hours I returned here to the hotel.

I am told by the First Colorado Bank that more of my money should be available in a day or two. Perhaps that will spur Tesla to greater efforts!

12th August 1900

Another abortive demonstration today. I was disappointed by the outcome. Tesla seemed puzzled, claiming that his calculations could not be in error.

The failure is briefly recorded. The prototype apparatus is a smaller version of his Coil, with the wiring arranged in a different fashion. After a prolonged lecture about the principles (none of which I

understood, and which I soon came to realize was delivered by Tesla mainly for his own sake, a form of thinking aloud), Tesla produced a metal rod which he or Mr Alley had painted in a distinctive orange colour. He placed it on a platform, immediately beneath a kind of inverted cone of wiring; the apex of the cone focused directly on the rod.

When at Tesla's instruction Mr Alley worked a large lever situated close by the original Coil, there was the noisy but now familiar outburst of arcing electrical discharge. Almost at once the orange rod was surrounded by blue-white fire, which snaked around it in a most intimidating way. (I, thinking of the illusion I wished to work on the stage, was quietly satisfied by the appearance of this.) The noise and incandescence built up quickly, and soon it seemed as if molten particles of the rod itself were splashing to the floor; that they were not was evidenced by the unchanged, unharmed appearance of the rod.

After a few seconds Tesla waved his hands dramatically, Mr Alley threw back the control lever, the electricity instantly died away, and the rod was still in place.

Tesla immediately became absorbed in the mystery, and, as has happened before, my presence was thereafter ignored. Mr Alley has recommended me to stay away from the laboratory for a few days, but I am acutely conscious of time running out. I wonder if I have sufficiently impressed this upon Mr Tesla?

18th August 1900

Today is notable less for a second failed demonstration than for the fact that Tesla and I have argued with some bitterness. This quarrel happened in the immediate aftermath of his machine's failure to work, and so we were both keyed up, I with disappointment, Tesla with frustration.

After the orange-painted rod had failed to move again, Tesla picked it up and offered it to me to hold. A few seconds before it had been bathed in radiant light, with sparks flying in every direction. I took it from him gingerly, expecting my fingers to be singed by it. Instead, it was cold. This is the odd thing: it was not just cool, in the sense that it had not been heated, but actively cold, as if it had been surrounded by ice. I hefted the rod in my hand.

"Any more failures like this, Mr Angier," Tesla said, in a friendly enough voice, "and I might be obliged to give you that as a souvenir."

"I shall take it," I replied. "Although I should prefer to take with me what I came here to buy."

"Given enough time I shall move the Earth."

"Time is what I do not have much of," I riposted, tossing the rod to the floor. "And it is not the Earth I wish to move. Nor is it this metal stick."

"Then pray name your preferred object," Tesla said, with sarcasm. "I shall concentrate on that instead."

At that moment I felt impelled to release some of the feelings I have been holding back for several days.

"Mr Tesla," I said. "I have stood by while you have been using a chunk of metal, assuming that you needed to do so for experimental purposes. Is it my understanding, at this belated moment, that you could be using something else instead?"

"Within reason, yes."

"Then why do you not build the thing to do what I require?"

"Because, sir, you have not expressly described your requirements!"

"They do not involve the sending of short iron sticks," I said hotly. "Even if the contraption were to work in the way I thought I had specified, it would be of little use to me. I wish it to transmit a living body! A man!"

"So you wish me to demonstrate my failures not on a hapless iron rod, but on a human being? Whom do you nominate for this dangerous experiment?"

"Why should it be dangerous?" I said.

"Because all experiment is risky."

"I am the one who will be using this."

"You wish to submit *yourself*?" Tesla laughed with brittle menace. "Sir, I shall require the remainder of your money before I start experimenting on you!"

"It is time for me to leave," I said, and turned away, feeling angry and chastened. I pushed past him and Alley, and made it to the outside. There was no sign of Randy Gilpin but I strode off anyway, determined if necessary to walk the whole way down to the town.

"Mr Angier, sir!" Tesla was standing at the door to his laboratory. "Let us not exchange hasty words. I should have explained properly to you. Had I but known that you wished to transmit living organisms, you would not have presented me with such a challenge. It is difficult to deal with massy, inorganic compounds. Living tissue is not of the same order of problem."

"What are you saying?"

"If you wish me to transmit an organism, please return here tomorrow. It shall be done."

I nodded my confirmation then continued on my way, stepping on the loose gravel of the path that descended the mountainside. I expected to meet Gilpin on the way down, but even should he not appear I was anyway determined to make the most of the exercise. The road snaked down the mountain in a series of sharp bends doubling back on each other, often with a precipitous drop to the side.

When I had walked about half a mile my attention was caught by a flash of colour in the long grass beside the track, and I stopped to investigate. It was a short iron rod, painted orange, apparently identical to the one Tesla had been using. Thinking I might after all keep a souvenir of this extraordinary meeting with Tesla, I picked it up, brought it down the mountain, and I have it with me now.

19th August 1900

I found Tesla in a mood of despond when Gilpin deposited me at the laboratory this morning.

"I fear I am about to let you down," he said to me when he came to the door. "Much work remains, and I know how pressing is your return to Britain."

"What has occurred?" I inquired, glad that the anger that flared between us yesterday was a thing of the past.

"I believed it would be a simple matter with life organisms. The structure is so much simpler than that of the elements. Life already contains minute

amounts of electricity. I was working on the assumption that all I had to do was boost that energy. I am at a loss as to why this has not worked! The computations worked out exactly. Come and see the evidence for yourself."

Inside the laboratory I noticed Mr Alley was adopting a stance I had never associated with him before: he stood in bellicose fashion, arms folded protective-ly, jaw jutting pugnaciously, a man angry and defensive if ever I saw one. Beside him on the bench was a small wooden cage, containing a diminutive black cat with white whiskers and paws, presently asleep.

As his eyes were fixed on me as I walked in, I said, "Good morning, Mr Alley!"

"I hope you will not be a party to this, Mr Angier!" Alley cried. "I brought my children's cat on the firm promise that it would not be harmed. Mr Tesla gave me an exact assurance last night! Now he insists that we submit the wretched creature to an experiment that will undoubtedly kill it!"

"I don't care for the sound of this," I said to Tesla.

"Nor I. Do you think I am inhumane, capable of torturing one of God's more beautiful creatures?"

He led me to the apparatus, which I immediately saw had been entirely rebuilt overnight. When I was a foot or two away from it, I recoiled in horror! About half a dozen enormous cockroaches, with shiny black carapaces and long antennae, were scattered all around. They were the most repulsive creatures I had ever seen.

"They are dead, Angier," said Tesla, noticing my reaction. "They cannot harm you."

"Yes, dead!" said Alley. "And that's the rub! He intends me to place the cat in the same jeopardy."

I looked down at the huge and disgusting insects, wary of any sign from them of a return to life. I stepped back again when Tesla nudged at one with the toe of his boot, and turned it over for me to see.

"It seems I have built a machine that murders roaches," Tesla murmured gently. "They are God's creatures too, and I am made despondent by it all. I did not intend that this device should take life."

"What's going wrong?" I said to Tesla. "Yesterday you sounded so sure."

"I have calculated and recalculated a dozen times. Alley has checked the mathematics too. It is the nightmare of every experimental scientist: an inexplicable dichotomy between theoretical and actual results. I confess I am confounded. Such a thing has never happened to me before."

"May I see the calculations?" I said.

"Of course you may, but if you are not a mathematician I fear they will not convey much to you."

He and Alley produced a great loose-leaf ledger in which his computations had been carried out, and together we pored over them for a long time. Tesla showed me, as best I was able to understand, the principle behind them, and the calculated results. I nodded as intelligently as I could, but only at the end, when I could take the calculations for granted and concentrate on the results, did an unexpected glimmering of sense shine through.

"You say that this determines the distance?" I said.

"That is a variable. For purposes of experimentation I have been using a value of 100 metres, but such a distance is academic, since, as you see, nothing I try to transmit travels any distance at all."

"And this value here?" I said, jabbing my finger at another line.

"The angle. I have been using compass points. It will direct in any of 360 degrees from the apex of the energy vortex. Again, for the time being that is entirely academic."

"Do you have a setting for elevation?" I asked.

"I am not using it. Until the apparatus is fully working I am merely aiming into the clear air to the east of the laboratory. One must be careful not to cause a rematerialization in a position already occupied by another mass! I do not care to think what might happen."

I looked thoughtfully at the neatly inscribed mathematics. I do not know the process by which it happened, but suddenly I was struck by inspiration! I dashed out of the laboratory and stared from the doorway due east. As Tesla had said, what lay beyond was mostly clear air, because in this direction the plateau was at its narrowest and the ground began to drop away some ten metres from the path. I moved quickly over and looked downwards. Below me I could glimpse through the trees the pathway snaking down the mountainside.

When I returned to the laboratory I went straight to my portmanteau and pulled out the iron rod I had found beside the path yesterday evening. I held it up for Tesla to see.

"Your experimental object, I do believe?" I said.

"Yes it is."

I told him where I had found it, and when. He hurried across to the apparatus where its twin was lying, discarded in favour of the unlucky cockroaches. He held the two together, and Alley and I stood with him, marvelling at their identical appearance.

"These marks, Mr Angier!" Tesla breathed in awe, lightly fingering a criss-cross patch neatly etched into the metal. "I made them so that I might prove by identification that this object had been transmitted through the aether. But –"

"It has made a facsimile of itself!" Alley said.

"Where did you say you found this, sir?" Tesla demanded.

I led the two men outside and explained, pointing down the mountain. Tesla stared in silent thought.

Then he said, "I need to see the actual place! Show me!" To Alley he said, "Bring the theodolite, and some measuring tape! As soon as you can!"

And with that he set off down the precipitous path, clutching me by my upper arm, imploring me to show him the exact location of the find. I assumed I would be able to lead him straight to it, but as we moved further down the track I was no longer so sure. The huge trees, the broken rocks, the scrubby forest-floor vegetation, all looked much alike. With Tesla gesticulating at me and gabbling in my ear it was almost impossible to concentrate.

I eventually came to a particular turn in the path where the grass grew long, and I paused before it.

Alley, who had been trotting after us, soon caught us up and under Tesla's directions set up the theodolite. A few careful measurements were enough for Tesla to reject the place.

After about half an hour we had agreed on another likely site. It was exactly to the east of the laboratory, although of course a substantial distance beneath it. When we took into account the steepness of the mountainside, and the fact that the iron rod would have bounced and rolled on hitting the ground, it did seem that this was a likely position in which it would end up. Tesla was evidently satisfied, and he was deep in thought as we walked back up the mountain to his laboratory.

I too had been thinking, and as soon as we were inside once more I said, "May I make a suggestion?"

"I am already greatly indebted to you, sir," Tesla replied. "Say what you will!"

"Since you are able to calibrate the device, rather than simply aim your experiments into the air to the east of us, could you not send them a shorter distance? Perhaps across the laboratory itself, or outside to the area surrounding the building?"

"We evidently think alike, Mr Angier!"

In all the times I had been with him I had never seen Tesla so cheerful, and he and Alley set to work immediately. Once again I became supernumerary, and went to sit silently at the rear of the laboratory. I have long since fallen into the habit of taking some food with me to the laboratory (Tesla and Alley have the most irregular feeding habits when engrossed by their work) and so I ate the sandwiches made for me by the staff at the hotel.

After a longer and more tedious period than I can describe here, Tesla finally said, "Mr Angier, I believe we are ready."

And so it was that I went to examine the apparatus, for all the world like a member of a theatre audience invited on stage to inspect a magician's cabinet, and with Tesla I went outside and established beyond doubt that his designated target area was empty of any metal rods.

When he inserted the experimental rod, and manipulated his lever, a most satisfactory bang heralded successful completion of the experiment. The three of us rushed outside, and sure enough, there on the grass, was the familiar orange-painted iron rod.

"Tomorrow, sir," Tesla said to me, "tomorrow, and with the consent of my noble assistant here, we shall endeavour to safely transport the cat from one place to another. If that can be achieved, I take it you will be satisfied?"

"Indeed, Mr Tesla," I said warmly. "Indeed."

15th December 1900

London

Most of the past three weeks have been an agony of frustration, because I have been waiting for electricity to be supplied to my workshop. I have been like a small boy with a toy I could not play with. The Tesla apparatus has been erected in my workshop ever since I picked it up from Mount Pleasant, but with



out a supply of current it is useless. I have read Mr Alley's lucid instructions a thousand times! However, after my increasingly frequent reminders and urgings, the London Electricity Company has at last done the necessary work.

I have been rehearsing ever since, wrapped up mentally and emotionally in the demands this extraordinary device makes on me. Here, in no particular order, is a summary of what I have learned.

It is in full working order, and has been ingeniously designed to work on all presently known versions of electrical supply. This means I may travel with my show, even to Europe, the USA and (Alley claims in his instructions) the Far East.

However, I cannot perform my show unless the theatre has electrical current supplied. In future I will have to check this before I accept any new bookings, as well as many other new matters (some of which follow).

Portability. I know Tesla has done his best, but the equipment is damnably heavy. From now on, planning the delivery, unpacking and setting up of the apparatus is a priority. It means, for instance, that the simple informality of a train-ride to one of my shows is a thing of the past, at least if I wish to perform the Tesla illusion.

Technical rehearsals. The apparatus has to be erected twice. First for private testing on the morning of the show, then, while the main curtain is down and another act is in progress, it has to be re-erected for the performance. The admirable Alley has included suggestions as to how it might be carried out speedily and silently, but even so this is going to be hard work. Much rehearsal will be necessary, and I shall require extra assistants.

Physical layout of the theatres. I or Adam Wilson will always need to reconnoitre beforehand.

Boxing the stage. This is practicably straightforward, but in many theatres it antagonizes the backstage staff, who for some reason think they have an automatic right to have revealed to them what they consider to be trade secrets. In this case, allowing strangers to see what I am actually doing on stage is out of the question. Again, more preparatory work than usual will be necessary.

Post-performance sealing of the apparatus, and private disassembly, are also procedures fraught with risk. I cannot accept any bookings until these procedures have been worked out and ensuing problems resolved.

All this special preparation! However, careful planning and rehearsal are in the essence of successful stage magic, and I am no stranger to any of them.

One small step forward. All stage illusions are given names by their inventors, and it is by these that they become known in the profession. The Three Graces, Decapitation, Cassadaga Propaganda, are examples of three illusions at present popular in the halls. After some thought I have decided to call the Tesla invention *In a Flash*, and by this it will become known.

14th February 1901

I rehearsed *In a Flash* twice yesterday, and will do so twice again tomorrow. I dare not make it any

more than that. I shall be performing it on Saturday evening at the Trocadero in Holloway Road, then at least once again in the week following. I believe that if I can perform regularly enough then extra rehearsals, beyond stage movements, misdirection and patter, should not be necessary.

Tesla warned me that there would be aftereffects, and these are indeed profound. It is no trivial matter to use the apparatus. Each time I pass through it I suffer.

In the first place there is the physical pain. My body is wrenched apart, disassembled. Every tiny particle of me is thrown asunder, becoming one with the aether. In a fraction of a second, a fraction so small that it cannot be measured, my body is converted into electrical waves. It is radiated through space. It is reassembled at its designated target.

Slam! I am broken apart! Slam! I am together again!

It is a violent shock that explodes in every part of me, in every direction. Imagine a steel bar smashing into the palm of your hand. Now imagine ten or twenty more hammering down in the same place from different angles. More fall on your fingers, your wrist. A hundred more strike the back of your hand. The ends of your fingers. Every joint.

More explode out from inside your flesh.

Now spread the pain through your whole body, inside and out.

Slam!

A millionth of a second of total agony!

Slam again!

That is how it feels.

Yet I arrive in the selected place, and I am exactly as I was that millionth of a second earlier. I am whole in myself, and identical to myself, but I am in the shock of ultimate pain.

The first time I used the Tesla apparatus, with no warning of what I was to experience, I collapsed to the floor in the belief that I had died. It did not seem possible that my heart, my brain, could survive such an explosion of pain. I had no thoughts, no emotional reactions. It felt as if I had died, and I acted as if I had died.

As I slumped to the floor my wife Julia, who of course was there with me for the test, ran to my side. My first lucid memory in the post-death world is of her gentle hands reaching into my shirt to feel for a sign of life. I opened my eyes, in shock and amazement, happy beyond words to find her beside me, to feel her tenderness. Quickly I was able to stand, to reassure her that I was well, to hold her and kiss her, to be myself once more.

In truth, then, physical recovery from this brutal experience is itself speedy, but the mental consequences are formidable.

On the day of that first test I forced myself to repeat it in the afternoon, but as a result I was cast into the darkest gloom for much of the Christmas period. I had died twice. I had become one of the walking dead, a damned soul.

Yesterday, in the electrical brightness and familiarity of my London workshop, I felt I should undergo two more rehearsals. I am a performer, a professional. I must give an appearance to what I do, give it a sheen and a glamour. I must project

myself about the theatre in a flash, and at the moment of arrival I must appear to be a magician who has successfully performed the impossible.

To sink to my knees, as if poleaxed, would be out of the question. To reveal even a glimpse of the millionth-second of agony I have endured would also be unconscionable.

The point is that I have a double level of subterfuge to convey. A magician ordinarily reveals an effect that is "impossible": a piano seems to disappear, a billiard ball magically reproduces itself, a lady is made to pass through a sheet of mirrorglass. The audience of course knows that the impossible has not been made possible.

In a Flash, by scientific method, in fact achieves the hitherto impossible. What the audience sees is actually what has happened! But I cannot allow this ever to be known, for science has in this case replaced magic.

I must, by careful art, make my miracle less miraculous. I must emerge from the elemental transmitter as if I have *not* been slammed apart, and slammed together again.

So I have been trying to learn how to prepare for and brace myself against the pain, how to react to it without keeling over, how to step forward with my arms raised and with a flashing smile to bow and acknowledge applause. To mystify sufficiently, but not too much.

I write of what happened yesterday, because last night, when I returned home, I was in too great a despair even to think of recording what had happened. Now it is the afternoon and I am more or less myself again, but already the prospect of two more rehearsals tomorrow is daunting and depressing me.

16th February 1901

I am full of trepidation about tonight's performance at the Trocadero. I have spent the morning at the theatre, setting up the apparatus, testing it, dismantling it, then locking it away again safely in its crates.

After that, as anticipated, came the protracted negotiations with the scene-shifters, actively hostile to my intentions of boxing the stage. In the end, a straightforward cash transaction settled the matter and my wishes prevailed, but it has meant a huge dent in my income for the show. This illusion is clearly only performable if I can demand fees greatly in excess of anything I have earned before. A lot depends on the show tonight.

Now I have an hour or two of free time, before I must go back to Holloway Road. I plan to spend part of it with Julia and the children, and try to take a short nap in whatever is left. I am so keyed up, however, that sleep seems only remotely possible.

17th February 1901

Last night I safely crossed the aether from the stage of the Trocadero to the royal box. The equipment worked perfectly.

But the audience did not applaud because it did not see what was happening! When finally the applause came it was more bemused than enthusiastic.

The trick needs a stronger build-up, a greater sense

of danger. And the point of arrival must be picked out with a spotlight, to draw attention to my position as I materialize. I have talked to Adam about it, and he suggests, ingeniously, that I might be able to rig up an electrical spur from the apparatus so that turning on the light is not left to a stagehand but is commanded by me from the stage. Magic always improves.

We perform again on Tuesday at the same theatre.

I have left the best to last – I was able to disguise completely the shock of the impact on me. Both Julia, who saw the show from the auditorium, and Adam, who was watching from the rear of the stage through a small flap in the box screen, say my recovery was almost flawless. In this case it works to my advantage that the audience was not fully attentive, because only these two noticed the single weakness that occurred (I took one inadvertent step backwards).

For myself, I can say that practice with the apparatus has meant the terrible shock is not nearly as terrible as before, and that it has been getting slightly better each time I try it. I can foresee that in a month or so I will be able to bear the effect with outward indifference.

I also note that the consequent gloom I suffer is much less than after my first attempts.

23rd February 1901

My performance on Tuesday, much improved after the lessons of the weekend, gained me a laudatory review in *The Stage*, an outcome more to my favour than anything else I can imagine! On the train yesterday Julia and I read and re-read the words to each other, glorying in the undoubted effect they will have on my career. By our temporary exile here in our Derbyshire house we will not learn of tangible results until we are back in London early next week, when we have finished here. I can wait contented. The children are with us, the weather is cold and brilliant, and the moorland scenery is ravishing us with its muted colours.

I feel I am at last approaching the peak years of my career.

Copyright © Christopher Priest, 1995. This extract appears by permission of Simon & Schuster.

Christopher Priest lives with his wife, writer Leigh Kennedy, and their two children in Hastings, East Sussex. Unfortunately, Chris tends not to write short stories these days, but his first new novel in several years, *The Prestige*, is published by Simon & Schuster in September 1995. The above extract, though it makes for a free-standing and self-explanatory story, forms just a small part of a long, complex and very cunning narrative in which not all is what at first it seems...

OUTWARDS FROM THE CENTRE

CHRISTOPHER PRIEST was born in 1943, and published his first short story in 1966 and his first novel, *Indoctrinaire*, in 1970. In 1983 he was named as one of the ten best Young British Novelists (at the age of 39!) in a Book Marketing Council promotion. He lives in Hastings, on the Sussex coast, with his wife and fellow-writer, Leigh Kennedy, and their five-year-old twins, Elizabeth and Simon. I interviewed him at his home, a few months before the publication of his latest novel, *The Prestige* (due from Simon & Schuster / Touchstone in September 1995).

Alan Roche: Chris, your novels *The Affirmation* and *The Glamour*, both focus on the unreliability of memory to distinguish fact from fiction, truth from falsehood, an idealized sense of the past from its reality. What is it about memory that causes you to use these ideas in your fiction?

Christopher Priest: (Looks perplexed and laughs.) Can't remember! Most fiction is told in the past. But it's organized; it tells a story. Real memory isn't like that; it's much more chaotic. Many of us cannot remember the order our actions took place in, even if we can remember what we actually did. I grew interested in fiction that reflected this.

Roche: The way memory functions is linked with different perceptions of reality – the imagined world in conflict with the real world. This conflict seems to be at the heart of much of your work and is obviously very important to you, isn't it?

Priest: I'm fascinated by the different interpretations of the same event witnessed by groups of people. If six people witness a bank robbery you'll get six different descriptions of what happened. And I'm often intrigued to hear someone describe an event that I have attended and learn that they saw something completely different going on.

Roche: Are the ideas which you use to structure your narrative more important to you as themes or for building your plots?

Priest: The narrative starts as an idea, a notion for a story. *The Glamour* was built up from a plot idea that's admittedly a bit of an old chestnut: is a person responsible for his or her actions when suffering from loss of memory? If you kill someone and can't remember doing it, are you guilty? By the time I'd worked on that for a bit it had grown into a complicated metaphor where invisibility stood for amnesia. I couldn't have worked it out from the ground up: I needed a sort of framework of plot to think about it.

The thing is, all the books I write are connected with my life. Ideas about memory loss and the way in which the real world impinges on the imagined are topics which interest me.

Roche: When I first read *The Glamour* I thought that perhaps the idea arose out of that old saying, "sorry, didn't see you there."

Priest: Yes, I know what you mean. There are some people who are just not

seen. I find the idea of *The Glamour* very plausible.

Roche: In your fiction there is a sense of your characters not being able to distinguish reality from imagination; truth from falsehood. Is this how you see the human predicament?

Priest: I think that's too simplistic. What interests me is the way in which people can make themselves believe as facts things that seem to me demonstrably untrue. About two years ago I attended a lecture in Hastings about UFOs and alien abduction. I find all that sort of stuff intriguing. But I rapidly came to the conclusion that I was the only person in the room who *hadn't* been abducted! And I thought – they're all daft as brushes. But I can't question their belief.

Roche: There are no explicit religious or spiritual motifs in your novels, but there is often the sense that your main characters are seeking some definitive truth or reality in what are explicitly secular societies. Would you agree with this?

Priest: Yes. But there's a moral code, you see. That's a different thing. I'm not an atheist. That requires a strong belief system.

Agnosticism appeals to me because I am one of the world's Don't Knows. I'm not sure of anything.

Roche: What's your view on readers who say that novels like *The Affirmation*, *The Glamour* and *The Quiet Woman* are not science fiction?

Priest: I hear this from a lot of people and I can see what they mean. But at the same time, I've discovered that the people who seem to appreciate my stuff best are science-fiction readers. It's a complex subject. Let me explain my feelings, if I can.

When I started writing, about 30 years ago, there was a sort of movement in science fiction that came from the centre. It involved writers like J. G. Ballard, Tom Disch, Philip K. Dick. These people were taking the "spiritual heart" of science fiction and moving it forward, away from its crappy past into something that promised better. That seemed to me worth doing. The stuff I've written ever since has stuck to that principle, has evolved from what I see as the centre of science fiction. But what has happened since is that far from turning their backs on the past, most science-fiction writers now embrace it. Most of the books on the sf shelves in book-shops today reflect that crappy past. You have big and rotten fantasies, TV novelizations and spoofs. Not much else at all; not much that's serious, anyway. I'm very serious about books.

What I feel now is that the heartland of science fiction has been marginalized by a drift into trivia. And I'm now seen as being out on the loony fringe, accused of writing mainstream literature. But I feel that I have stuck to what a lot of us found stimulating about sf in the 1960s. This was that it was a living form of literature which was capable of change and experiment, and you could always press on within it, getting better, and more serious, and more adventurous. I don't think the stuff being published and sold now has a future. How many times can you write a spoof on *Dr Who*?

Roche: On your evidence, Chris, science fiction as a genre is in a pretty bad way.

Priest: The genre's probably dead, or well on the way. "Genre" is the wrong word, but for something like science fiction to have any sort of meaning it has to be a place where new or interesting or difficult writers can work, where they can test the rules. There needs to be more writers like John Sladek, who is one of those writers who doesn't write sf but who doesn't write anything else, in the old sense.

Roche: When I first read *The Affirma-*

tion, I had no pre-conceived ideas that it was a science-fiction book or that you were an sf writer. I read it as a literary or mainstream novel. After I had read *The Glamour*, *The Quiet Woman* and then *A Dream of Wessex* and *Inverted World* I thought perhaps you had consciously divided your fiction into mainstream and science fiction. But this isn't true, is it?



Christopher Priest interviewed by Alan Roche

Priest: No. Iain Banks does that. I don't know how the hell he does! I just write my own books. I see both *The Affirmation* and *The Prestige* as both being "of" science fiction. They're products of the movement I mentioned earlier. I agree that *The Affirmation* is not science fiction. But if it's not – what the hell is it? The trouble, I think, is that the definitions of science

fiction are not flexible enough to include novels like *The Affirmation* and *The Glamour*. My feelings about that are, "well, stuff the definitions! I just want to write my own books."

Roche: Magic Realism (sharply etched realism with elements of the fantastic and dreamlike) is a label that perhaps could be applied to some elements of your fiction. Would you agree?

Priest: Yeah. But I wouldn't personally apply that term. I think there are only two magic realists worth reading. Neither are British: Milan Kundera and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. I just feel I'm struggling against other people's prejudices; people who say: "but you don't write sf." But what is sf? I don't know any more. All I know is that I've been writing this kind of stuff for about 20 years now, and it's about time people twigged what I'm on about.

Roche: There's a sense, I believe, among new writers, that if it's science fiction the story can be as outlandish as you like, that it need make no sense at all – that somehow, because it's sf, it's easier to write.

Priest: Ha! Well, if they think that they're wrong. I write one book every four or five years. Simply because I find it hard. I certainly don't see it as a soft touch and I wish I could write three or four books a year. I find the limitations of the genre interesting. What I do is to push against the edges set by the limitations; distort them, make it uncomfortable for the reader, so that the reader has to deal with the novel on my terms not theirs.

Roche: *Inverted World* gives us a glimpse into a surreal future, rich in images. One which stands out for me is the image of figures walking into the horizon, becoming squatter and flatter the further they walk. The city Earth, which turns out to be a massive IBM-type building on tracks, creates, in my imagination, a tragic-comical image of a dead bureaucracy. Together with the earlier image, it hints at a world crushed under the weight of the inertia that accompanies red tape. Am I being too fanciful?

Priest: Well, it's not what I was thinking when I was writing it. But there's a tension between the structure of the plot and the ideas presented to me through my unconscious. If it's a good bit, and it works, I leave it in. And I feel that this is communicated to the

reader's unconscious, too. You tap into a series of archetypes. I'm not an allegorist – but there are allegorical bits in it. There's a great rawness about *Inverted World*, which I think is what a lot of people have found attractive about the book. I'm far too inhibited to write like that now.

Roche: The images and symbols in *Inverted World* do add up to suggest the metaphor I mentioned earlier. As a writer do you invent your metaphor first or does it grow organically from the narrative?

Priest: The latter. When I'm writing best I'm cruising along with a terrific plot and I'm allowing the unconscious to play its part too. I get into this surfing mentality.

Roche: What were the main ideas behind *A Dream of Wessex*?

Priest: It started as an idea about a group of individuals who get together to think about the future. One of them gets stuck there. When I started writing the book I realized I was dealing with sf. One aspect of science fiction, of which I totally disapprove, is to do with future histories; the future treated as a reality. It's not quite predicting the future, but it's taking the future really seriously. To me the future is completely unknown. Any dealing with the future is a metaphorical approach from the present. Once you realize that sf is a metaphorical approach to your own world, freedom breaks out. You can do all sorts of things with it. And that's what *A Dream of Wessex* is all about.

Roche: *The Space Machine*, your homage to H. G. Wells, is written in the tone of a 19th-century writer. Why did you decide to do this?

Priest: At the time, the mid-1970s, I wanted to write something a bit different from my usual stuff. My prose was then being regularly described as cold and clear, unfunny and unemotional. Clinical. I just wanted to write a comedy. What I like about Wells is his sense of fun.

Roche: In what ways is Wells important to you as a writer?

Priest: He's just a great writer, isn't he? The trouble with the later Wells is that he fell for the future-history lark. And he started believing in it: as a prophet, as a seer. Then he started hectoring and nagging. I don't think a

writer can influence or protect you from anything.

Roche: I'd like to get your opinion on some current trends in fiction. What's your attitude to the postmodernist approach to narrative as being a commentary on its own fictionality?

Priest: Well, it's a blight on literature. The only postmodernists worth a candle are Kundera, Nabokov and Calvino. I also like John Fowles's work. But in general, bloody postmodernism has landed on the current British novel like the pox. I think anyone who admires second-raters



like Martin Amis should read Kundera and see how the master does it.

Roche: *The Affirmation* could be read, on one level, as a novel describing the process and the struggle of writing fiction: although it is woven within the overall novel. How do you feel about this sort of interpretation?

Priest: I get very defensive when I hear people saying, in a lofty way, as they sometimes have, "this is yet another novel about writing novels."

Roche: Yes, but I said "on one level": it's just one part of the plot and fits in with the overall theme of memory-loss. What makes this aspect work is its subtlety.

Priest: There are good things to be taken from postmodernism and all

the other "isms." Things speak to you. I can't pretend not to be influenced by Kundera, but I hope that what I take from him is not so much the effects, but the spirit of having a go, of trying out something a bit odd or difficult. Then of assimilating it, making it mine. *The Affirmation* was written at the beginning of the 1980s, by which time I'd read quite a lot of postmodernist fiction – and formed negative views about it. The instinct in postmodernism to be ironic and to examine the text is worth doing. But I object to the clod-hopping way postmodern techniques are usually used. You know, Peter Ackroyd breaking off from his biography of Dickens to interview himself about the research he had to do. That sort of thing.

Roche: Do you think the "personal factor," engendered by self-publicity, will become of more interest than the writer's work?

Priest: In the end, no. Because publicity goes to the wind. And the books have an annoying habit of sticking around for years and years. I think that self-publicity reveals an insecurity about the work – that somehow it has to be propped up. I mean doing an interview like this is self-publicity.

Roche: Some of your earlier work's dramatic content arises out of the psychological trauma brought about by conflicting interpretations of reality. *The Prestige* is a departure from these ideas, isn't it?

Priest: Yes. I don't have a master scheme; I take each novel as it comes. If it's different from the other stuff it's because one has to move on. I can't go back to my earlier novels; I said all I want to say about that sort of subject. I had to break away from those ideas. *The Prestige* has two narratives dealing with the same event: and the conflict is about comprehension, not about understanding reality.

Roche: But you use magic and illusion for a particular reason don't you?

Priest: No. Well, I don't want to give too much of it away really. I was interested in the concept of twinship... But what *The Prestige* is really about is secrecy: about the way people will protect a secret – no matter how trivial.

Roche: I have had the privilege of reading *The Prestige* in manuscript, and I enjoyed it immensely. I think others will too. Thanks very much for the interview, Chris.

On the Thursday I drove home from work as usual, leaving the office car park at five past five. I was in a good mood – the phrase “only one more day to go” kept echoing in my head. I was looking forward to the four weeks’ leave, thinking of it as an extra holiday. The whole notion of paternity leave seemed so new, so strange, that I couldn’t help thinking of it as a stroke of good luck rather than something ordinary, something from which anyone and everyone might benefit. I suppose it was a stroke of luck that the firm was so up-to-date, so enthusiastic to capture and keep its young executives that it had put such provisions into its package.

The traffic wasn’t too heavy even on that nightmarish stretch of the M25 connecting the M3 to the M4, which had temporarily shrunk to three lanes while they were widening it to seven. I got home about 5.40, put the car in the garage, and breezed into the house as if I hadn’t got a care in the world. I called out to Ginny but I didn’t think anything of it when she didn’t call back or rush to meet me – it was difficult for her to do anything in a hurry, being nine months gone. I must have been pottering around downstairs for ten minutes and more before it finally occurred to me that maybe I ought to take a look.

I can’t describe what it was like to open the bedroom door and see all that blood. She’d actually taken the duvet off the bed and put down two bath-towels, obviously expecting that there’d be some blood and intending to mop it all up, but she could have had no notion of what would actually happen. Both towels were soaked through and the blood had spread out both sides on to the sheet and through to the mattress. She still had the coat-hanger in her hand, with the hook part straightened out and the rest twisted into some bizarre configuration.

I honestly thought she was dead. I didn’t see how anyone could lose that much blood and not be dead, but it seems these things can be very deceptive. Even though I thought that she was dead, I leapt for the phone beside the bed and punched out 999, hysterically demanding an ambulance. It wasn’t until I knew the ambulance was on its way that I tried to take a pulse and realized that she was still breathing. It was then that my fear changed focus, and I felt a cold surge of terror at the thought that the baby must be dead... and it wasn’t until the shock of that thought had subsided that I realized that that must have been the whole point – that must have been what she was trying to do.

What other reason could a nine-months pregnant woman have for sticking a partially unbent wire coat-hanger up herself, except to carry out a ridiculously late abortion?

After that, the fear was displaced by something else. It wasn’t exactly horror, more a sharply painful sense of not being able to understand, of there being

Brian
Stableford



no conceivable explanation. It made no sense, and there seemed to be no possible sense that it could make. It wasn’t just that the word *why?* kept echoing inside my head – the worst thing was the awareness that the question had no imaginable or excusable answer.

The ambulance arrived within five minutes, which was good considering the time of day and the fact that the house is two-and-a-half miles from the hospital. The paramedics didn’t waste any time. They hooked up a drip before they even tried to move her – not real blood but synthetic stuff, designed to be reaction-free. They must have pumped three or four pints in before they fetched the stretcher to set beside her. They were very careful – they didn’t want the bleeding to start again. Neither of them said a word about the coat-hanger. One of them gently took it out of her hand and laid it aside.

“Will she be all right?” I asked, while they were strapping her on. I was already trying to figure out how they were going to get the stretcher round the bend in the stairs.

“I think so,” said the senior paramedic. “It looks worse than it is.”

“What about...?”

He didn’t let me finish. “Can’t tell about the baby,” he said. “Touch and go. They’re surprisingly tough. Have to see.”

They were very clever on the stairs. They took the bend very smoothly, as if they’d had years of practice and as if Ginny weighed nothing at all. We made it to A&E in four minutes flat, without so much as a bump or a sway.

In a way, that was the easy part for me, because I could count it down – every second was a step on the way. Once they wheeled her off into the depths of the department, though, I was stranded in that desolate waiting-area full of drunks and wailing children, not having the slightest idea how long it would be before they’d bring me any news or let me go to see her. I don’t mind waiting so much when I know what time I’m aiming for, but sitting there in turmoil, watching the red second hand sweep around and around and around without any sign of progress was hell on earth.

It was 8.15 when the doctor finally came out.

"Your wife's stable, Mr Coxon," she said. "The baby's heart is still beating, and there's no sign of any damage to the foetus itself, but we'll have to make a further investigation to determine how much damage has been done to the birth canal. We'll have to do a Caesarean, but we'll have to be careful in determining the right time. For the moment, it's best to leave things as they are, but we're monitoring the situation carefully."

"Can I see her now?" I asked.

"In a little while," she told me. "She's under sedation. She won't wake up for some hours. You'll be able to sit with her if you wish, but... I'm afraid there are some questions I must ask you first."

It shouldn't have come as a shock. I should have spent the previous two hours rehearsing my answers – but when I'd asked myself the question it had seemed so utterly unanswerable that I simply hadn't gone on to think about what I'd have to say to others in search of an explanation.

"I don't know," I said, before she could even formulate the question. "I don't know why she did it. I can't imagine."

"Had she been depressed?" the doctor asked. She was trying to be gentle, and there was no accusation in her tone, but her big dark eyes seemed to me to be like black searchlights projecting shadows into my head.

"No," I said, too promptly, and quickly changed the plea. "Well, a little... unusually quiet, tired, drained – but you'd expect that, wouldn't you? It's a strain, isn't it? She was bound to feel awkward, uncomfortable. She wanted it over, of course she did. She cursed the kid a bit, when she was kicked or got backache... bound to. Nothing serious. Of course she moaned... not nearly as much as I'd have moaned if I'd been blown up like that, with all the other petty discomforts, all the tedious waiting. I thought she was just exhausted, weary, washed out. Not clinically depressed. Not desperate."

I don't suppose the doctor's eyes were saying anything, really, but to me they seemed to be saying: *How would you know? How closely have you been watching her? How much time have you given to discussing her feelings? Really discussing them, intimately? Haven't you been consciously drawing away, throwing yourself into your work, glad of the excuse that you had to get things straight before you started your leave? Haven't you been glad these last few weeks that you were bringing work home, getting overtired, so that you didn't have to have too much to do with a wife who'd grown so big, so awkward, so ungainly, so...*

"We were both looking forward to the baby," I said, in a sort of anguished stage-whisper. "We both wanted the baby. We had everything set up, everything ready. Cot, pram, clothes, nappies... everything short of redecorating the spare room with Peter the Rabbit wallpaper. There was nothing wrong. Nothing."

It all rang true, inside. I was morally certain that it had been true... except that it plainly wasn't. All that blood on the bed, and that stupid twisted coat-hanger, were witnesses whose evidence was beyond doubt. Something had been wrong. Very wrong.

However much Ginny had wanted the baby, she had tried to kill it. But why? And why now? Why a mere three days from the big crunch? What could have happened to change her mind so suddenly, so dramatically? What could possibly have built up so fast, gone so far? And why hadn't I known?

"We'll need to know," the doctor said, doubtless doing her utmost to sound uncritical. "We're obliged to inform social services. It's not a police matter, but you must understand that there will have to be some kind of investigation. I have to notify the hospital psychiatrist."

"Yes," I said, "I understand."

But I didn't understand at all. And I hated myself for not having had the least inkling that any such thing might happen, for not seeing whatever signs there had been, and for not having the least idea, now, what might have been going on in poor Ginny's head when she tried to skewer our child with a partially unbent coat-hanger.

"I think you ought to persuade her to talk to me," the psychiatrist said, as if it were my fault that she wouldn't. "This is a serious matter, not just because of the reports, and the fact that the child will have to be placed on the At-Risk Register, but because we have to know what went wrong before we can begin to put things right."

"I'm sorry," I told him. "She won't even talk to me, not that way. She just keeps saying that she's sorry. Maybe when they've done the Caesarean – but they had to put that off yesterday. It's rescheduled for this afternoon."

He was plainly unsatisfied, with me as well as Ginny. I felt that he must be thinking that the real blame lay with me – that my not having known it was going to happen was glaring evidence of my inadequacy as a husband and parent-to-be. I understood only too well how he might feel that way. How could I not have known? How could I be so utterly ignorant now as not even to be able to venture a hypothesis? After all, we'd been married six months, living together for more than a year. How could I not know her, unless there was something deeply wrong with me?

"Can you tell me anything about her relationship with her parents?" the psychiatrist asked.

"Not really," I said, horribly conscious of the inadequacy of such information as I had. "They were killed in a car-crash eight or nine years ago, when she was 15. That was in California of course – she came to England afterwards to live with her grandmother. She didn't talk about them much, but she didn't seem over-sensitive about it. She never liked watching *LA Law* on TV, but that didn't seem particularly neurotic. She has photographs of her parents, but she doesn't keep them on display anywhere and she doesn't look at them often. She gets on all right with my Mum and Dad though – absolutely fine. Her grandmother's still alive but she's in a home now – she has Alzheimer's. Ginny and I visit her once a month, but it's... well, not easy to hold a conversation. I never knew her when she was okay, but she looked after Ginny well enough when Ginny first came over. The rot didn't set in until Ginny was at

university. That's where we first met, though we didn't get together until after we graduated."

I would have gone on, just for the sake of keeping it going, pretending to be doing some good, but I wasn't telling him anything he wanted to know. From his point of view, it was all a big zero. No obvious traumas, no vivid neuroses. Around me, Ginny had always been rigorously normal.

Maybe too rigorously, I now thought. Once something goes badly wrong, even normality becomes suspicious, not so much a way of doing things as a way of hiding things.

"I'm sorry, Mr Coxon," said the psychiatrist, "but I don't have any more time right now. It really is important that you persuade your wife to talk to me, as soon as possible. Please do everything you can."

I promised I would, and went back to Ginny. She was still under sedation, but she was conscious. She didn't even seem spaced out, just a little dispirited. They'd given her a room to herself but I didn't suppose it was any kind of privilege; I figured they didn't want her polluting the minds of the other mothers-to-be with her bad example. I guess the last thing a ward full of anxious and fearful expectant mothers needs is someone in their midst who's tried to short-circuit the process with a little do-it-yourself surgery.

"I'm supposed to convince you that you have to talk to the psychiatrist," I told her. I'd always been open and honest with her. I'd always assumed that she was equally honest with me, although no one would ever have called her open.

"That wouldn't be a good idea," she said dully.

"Why?"

No answer.

"Because they'd take the baby away?" I suggested. "Because they'd lock you up and throw away the key? It's not like that. They really do want to help, you know. Give them credit for that. Do you want them to take the baby away? Hell's bells, Ginny, I'm your husband... I do have a certain interest in the kid. Don't you think you should have talked to me before you... don't you think you ought to talk to me now? What did I do that suddenly disqualified me from deserving an explanation?"

"There isn't one," she said.

"Does that mean you couldn't help yourself? It just happened. It wasn't any kind of decision."

"I was mad."

"But now you're sane again."

She just looked up at me, but the look said no. She was still mad – except, of course, that when you really are mad you think you're sane, so if you think you're mad you can't be. Not really. So they say, anyway. I moved from the chair to the bed and I picked up her hand so that I could hold it and stroke the back of it.

"Tell me, Ginny," I said. "Please tell me. I have to know. We're together in this – you, me and the baby. I have to know what we're up against. Sod the psychiatrist and the social services – they don't have to know, but I do. I'll promise not to tell anyone else if you insist, but I have to know because I'm on your side and I have to know what I'm doing."

She looked at me long and hard, knowing that I

was right. She didn't ask me to promise, probably because she knew full well that I wouldn't be able to tell the psychiatrist or the social worker, because if I did... well, it was the kind of thing you just didn't tell a psychiatrist or a social worker, because there's madness and there's madness, and it's always better to let everybody else think that you're only a little bit crazy instead of a lot.

She winced at some internal pang, maybe the baby inside her moving. I could tell that she was in pain, but she was fighting it, trying not to let it show, trying not to let it get on top of her. Maybe it was the pain, or just the knowledge that the baby was still alive, still active, still in a hurry to be born... or maybe a combination of all these things. Anyhow, something let the story begin to come out, and once it started, there was no going back.

"Dad was quite bright before he started doing the drugs," Ginny said. "Not successful, at least not by his lights, but okay. Competent, charming, nice. Not weird. It was easy to see what Mom saw in him. I loved him, a lot. Mom didn't do the drugs at first, but he got her into it. I guess he infected her with his own dissatisfactions, his own aspirations, his fervour for finding something more. That's very American, you know, very Californian. Everybody wants to be something else, something more. Everybody wants a new ticket in the lottery of life – not just a winning ticket but a new ticket that wins in a new and better way. Dad's parents had been born again, and him too, but in California nobody gets born again just once... well, hardly anybody."

"I don't know what you'd call the organization. A cult, I suppose, though it wasn't exactly a cult... not like the Moonies or that weird crowd that worshipped the atom bomb. In some ways it was more like the cryonics societies who wanted their heads frozen so that they could be resurrected come the time the requisite technology was invented, or the people who took all kinds of drugs that were supposed to keep them young and help them live forever. I think Dad started out on the so-called smart drugs before he got into the designer stuff, the pathway to transcendence, whatever..."

"Anyway, the organization didn't even have a name, as such. It wasn't even incorporated, or registered as a religion for the sake of the tax breaks. The members were above that sort of thing. The only handle it had was what its members were supposed to be developing, which was somatic potency."

"I was just a kid at the time, you understand – ten, eleven years old. By the time I turned 13 I'd given up the classes, stopped taking the drugs. I was a ward of court by then, and I was placed with foster-parents as soon as the legal process reached the end of the line. Mum and Dad had visiting rights but the visits had to be supervised and he wasn't allowed to feed me any lines. He wasn't allowed to talk about the organization – so what I know is a little hazy, and maybe even wackier than it really was. But the idea was, as I understand it, that mankind was supposed to be on the threshold of some kind of

new evolutionary leap, something that would remake us all – or the favoured few, at least – into a new image closer to God's. The time was both ripe and desperate – like, this leap had to be made soon, before the end of the millennium, if the world were to survive the coming ecocatastrophe. I don't know exactly how it was all backed up – a bit of Bible, a smidgen of the Age of Aquarius, lots of fringe science, all kinds of things – but the people in the organization really had a sense of mission, based partly in panic and discontent about the status quo and partly in the conviction that they and they alone had the real answer.

"The basic idea of somatic potency was that the empire of the mind is still very limited. We only have conscious control over a fraction of the things going on in our bodies, lots of things inside us function independently of consciousness – but according to the organization, it was possible with the right kind of training and the right drugs to cultivate a true empire of the mind. They sucked up things like biofeedback – you know, where you can use an ECG display to learn to control your alpha-rhythms, things like that – but they took the whole set of ideas much further. According to these guys, you could learn to cultivate total somatic awareness – become consciously aware of what was going on in every tissue and every cell of your body, and gradually extend that awareness into full control. According to the organization anyone and everyone, given enough time and enough effort, could learn to control, cultivate and mobilize his or her own immune system so that any and all bacteria or viruses, any and all injuries and cancers, could be zapped without the aid of medicines. And that was only phase one.

"Somatic potency was supposed to make you immune to all ills – they claimed that the placebo effect was evidence not only of what could be done but of mankind's readiness to do it. If you had somatic potency cancer couldn't get you and AIDS couldn't get you. The development of new skills, physical and intellectual, was supposed to become much easier. You were supposed to be able to take control of your dreams and use dreaming as a kind of arena where these new skills could be developed and practised. Dreaming, the prophets of the organization claimed, was an incredibly powerful personal resource which was just lying there waiting to be developed, cultivated and used as soon as consciousness could secure a proper grip on it. The promises went even further than that – in a nutshell, somatic potency was supposed to turn men into supermen, not exactly overnight but quite possibly within the space of a single lifetime... a lifetime which would, of course, expand as your somatic potency grew. Anyone was supposed to be able to do it, given the right attitude and the right training. The training didn't come cheap, of course, but hey... if what you're buying is freedom from all ills, all pain and death itself, what price is too high? Anyhow, the organization worked like any pyramid-selling operation – once you were in and getting deeper you could finance your own programme by trawling for new recruits, spreading the word.

"I was in the organization for a couple of years. I did all kinds of weird exercises, some hypnotherapy. I played tapes to myself while I was asleep, spent time meditating and trying to make contact with each of my internal organs in turn. I was supposed to be a good student, although that may have been just what they told my Dad so he'd keep stumping up for advancement stages. I was supposed to be making strides in somatic awareness and control... and I certainly didn't get ill, although who's to say I would have if I hadn't been doing the classes? Maybe I even believed I was getting the awareness – lots of people could sucker themselves into that, though the control came a lot harder. Maybe I just pretended, for Dad's sake.

"It was feeding kids like me the drugs that got them into trouble... they were under investigation for that. That was the way they got attacked in the courts, by the Feds or whoever. The organization closed ranks, of course, held hard to their constitutional rights, but the one thing the courts could do even in spite of all the opposition was penalize them for feeding drugs to kids. The adults couldn't be shifted, but the kids could – kicking and screaming if necessary.

"I didn't go kicking and screaming. I never really wanted to be part of it in the first place... I was never brainwashed. I was only ever along for the ride, even at eleven. I did the classes, but my heart was never really in it. Hell, it was just like extra school, just something I had to do to toe the line. Maybe I did manage to get in touch with my liver and kidneys, or thought I did, but what the hell? What I really wanted to be in touch with was Nirvana – the band, not the place. I didn't want to be parted from Mom and Dad but Dad was getting so weird and Mom so helpless...

"Well, I sure didn't fight as hard as I could have. Maybe I was a fink. Maybe I let them down... not just the organization but Mom and Dad. They were broken-hearted, but...

"They had the smash that killed them while they were travelling home after a visit. I kept telling myself that the smash had nothing to do with Dad being upset, but they wouldn't have been on the freeway at all if it hadn't been for me. I put them there, and whatever somatic potency they'd been able to build up wasn't enough to get them around it or pull them through. It was all because of me. After they were dead, Gran insisted on taking me, and everyone thought that was for the best. A clean break. A new start. Put it all behind me, put it right out of my mind."

She paused, submerged by the tide of memory. No doubt somatic potency was supposed to improve your memory, too, make sure that you could never forget, never put anything behind you, or right out of your mind.

I let a couple of minutes go by before I tried to tell her, as gently as I could, that I didn't quite see what any of this had to do with what had happened. I was careful not to accuse her of anything or mention the twisted coat-hanger. She winced anyway, but I

couldn't tell whether it was because of what I'd said or something that was happening inside her.

I looked at the clock. They'd be coming to do the pre-op very soon, getting her ready for the Caesarean. We had less than an hour before they put her under. The red second hand was sweeping round and round the clock-face, as if it were stirring time itself into a vortex.

"Somatic potency," Ginny went on doggedly, "was supposed to be hereditary. Even if you couldn't get much benefit out of the training yourself... and let's face it, I don't suppose they managed to produce too many supermen or save too many HIV-positives from full-blown AIDS... even if you didn't seem to be reaping the rewards yourself, it was supposed to be doing wonders for your unborn kids. Did you know that a woman has all her egg-cells ready-made long before she's born? They're not like sperms, which get manufactured day by day. When I was in training, all my egg-cells were sitting there inside me. I was supposed to be paying particular attention to them with my emergent somatic awareness. I was supposed to be exerting every bit of whatever somatic potency I had to make sure that they'd be in tiptop condition... to make sure that whatever happened to me, whether I became a backslider, or an apostate, or a common-or-garden failure, they'd get the benefit."

"Oh shit," I whispered, as enlightenment began to dawn. Her face was tight. I could tell that the baby was restless in her womb, maybe getting into position to be born, not knowing that the usual exit-route was all torn up. I wondered whether I ought to call the doctor.

"It's all nonsense, of course," she went on, in a voice absolutely without colour or lustre. "All crazy. It's just me. I know that... except that I'm not sure, any more, exactly what knowing amounts to, or where it stops. I know perfectly well that people can't take command of their dreams, and I certainly know that a person's dreams can't be taken over by someone else, even when that someone else is inside them, sharing their own personal space, being part of their own compound body. Don't you think I know that? But knowing is just a limited form of somatic awareness, an embryonic phase in the evolution of the true mind... a hesitant step on the pathway that leads to the godman. Not the superman – they didn't use that term, because it had been cheapened by the comic books – but the godman. That's what somatic potency is supposed to lead to, if not this generation, then the next... or maybe the next after that, if we're too stupid or too scared to give evolution the kind of boost it needs. But they were just dreams, weren't they? I shouldn't even have remembered them, let alone..."

She stopped again. This time, I didn't let the silence extend so far. "What kind of dreams?" I whispered.

She tensed up, and if I hadn't been holding her hand she'd probably have clutched it to her distended body, but she was still struggling with all her might for control... for whatever somatic potency she had.

"The serpent," she said, faintly. "I dreamed... about the serpent."

I knew that if she'd meant snake she'd have said

snake. Her saying serpent called up two things to my mind: the serpent in Eden which had tempted Eve and caused the Fall, or the line in *Lear* which says how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child. I didn't know which one she meant. It could have been either. Except that Ginny wasn't a demon in disguise, and she surely hadn't been a thankless child. I knew that she hadn't.

"What...?" I began, but I didn't have a chance to finish.

"It knows, you see," she said – and now she did seem spaced out, as if she were losing it. "It didn't, at first. At first, it was only practising... practising being human. That's what cats do, you know. In their dreams, they practise their instincts. Someone cut something out of a cat's brains and the operation made it act out its dreams, and he watched it stalking and hunting and doing all the other things cats have to know how to do in order to be successful cats..."

"At first, it just practised... but it had access to all my memories, all my abilities. It had somatic awareness, self-awareness, awareness of me. It got access to all my secrets, learned everything. It was bright, you know... so bright that it was far too clever for its own good. It knew what I'd done, and what I was. It didn't hate me... oh no, it was above such things as hatred. It didn't even despise me, not really. Even if it had been able to talk to me – which it couldn't, not quite – it wouldn't have accused me of anything right out. It wouldn't have told me that I was an unfit daughter and an unfit mother. It would have been kind, even while it didn't understand. But it knew me better than I knew myself. It had the awareness I'd never quite managed to cultivate, and I knew that it was only a matter of time before it got the control, before it took me over completely and turned me into a zombie. The empire of the mind is like any other empire, you see. It can be conquered.

"It pitied me, I think. It pitied me because I'd gone so far and then stopped, without even knowing how far I'd gone, how close I'd got. It was better than me, you see. It knew better than I ever did how close to the brink I'd been, and how blind I'd been to let them take me away, to make me stop. It knew far better than I did what a fool I'd been, what a useless, thankless thing I was. It knew I'd broken my own mother's heart. It knew I'd killed my father as surely as if I'd put a knife into his heart. It had the awareness, you see, even though it was still waiting to be born. It was beginning... only beginning, but... aiming for control. Control of itself, and control of me.

"I tried to fight it... I really did. I told myself that I was crazy. I was crazy, wasn't I? I mean, none of this was real, or true. All of it was just dreams and delusions. They shouldn't have fed me those drugs, you know. Drugs can have long-term effects... they can affect your egg-cells, your babies still unborn. They said that in court. They put expert witnesses on the stand to say that. Expert witnesses, not crazy people, not cult members, not delinquent parents: experts. I knew I was crazy, and that I just had to hang on, hang on until the end. God, how I counted the days, the hours... but all that was helping it, you see... helping it

to pity me, leaving the way open for it to ransack my memories and plunder my abilities and use my dreams, use my dreams to practise, to learn control...

"I tried to use my own somatic potency against it, just to hold it in check until I could get it out. I fought it so hard, for so long, and I really thought I was going to make it. Just three more days..."

"But I wasn't good enough. I was never good enough. Even though it hadn't been born yet, it had more potency than me. The only advantage I had left was brute strength. I just couldn't hang on any longer. Time had run out. I couldn't get through the last few days to the birth. I had to stop it, Jim. I had to stop it turning me into a zombie, a slave, a helpless instrument of some little godling."

"I had to do it."

"Christ, Jim, you have no idea... no idea at all..."

There could be no doubt now that she was in severe pain. Her face was chalk-white and in spite of all her efforts she could hardly talk. The muscles of her face were being drawn into a rictus of agony and no matter how hard she fought to stay calm, to keep talking, to keep control, she simply couldn't do it.

"Nurse!" I yelled. "Nurse, for God's sake get in here!"

The nurse took 13 seconds to arrive, the doctor another 22. They couldn't have moved any faster. Everything they did they did with practised efficiency. They were good at their jobs: good and skilful and calm and utterly sure of themselves. I was stranded, left helpless. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what I was supposed to do or what I could do, but they tolerated that. They didn't send me away, they just worked around me.

All I did was hold Ginny's hand, and I kept holding it all the time... every minute of it. I didn't know what was happening, and I didn't even try to understand. I just held her hand and I did whatever the doctor or any of the nurses told me to do. I only let go to let them scrub my hand with something cold, before they gave me the mask and the gown.

I was there all the way through, watching. I counted the seconds and I counted the minutes, waiting for the climax to come... waiting, as it turned out, for the end.

The doctor was not at fault in any way. I told her that, even though I couldn't tell her the rest. The last time she'd examined Ginny and checked the situation the baby had been perfectly okay, and in the right position. That had only been a matter of minutes before I'd come in to talk to her. The baby hadn't tried to be born – its head hadn't even engaged, or whatever they call it when the foetus gets into position for the long journey down the narrow corridor. There was no way of knowing, no way of anticipating, no way of explaining how the umbilical cord got tangled around the baby's neck – around her neck, as it turned out. She was a girl.

A Caesarean section is supposed to avoid the possibility of things like that happening. A Caesarean section is supposed to whip the foetus out without it having to struggle or take risks or get things wrong. A Caesarean section is supposed to put the doctor in

control.

But sometimes, even if the doctor does everything right, things go wrong. It's a difficult business, being born. Some babies don't make it, coat-hangers or no coat-hangers.

It was an accident, of course. It would be crazy to think otherwise. Anyhow, even if there were such a thing as somatic potency, which there isn't, it was the baby who was supposed to have it, not Ginny. She couldn't have strangled the baby, even if she'd tried. The baby wouldn't have let her do it.

It was definitely an accident.

The umbilical cord is a strange thing, when you think about it. Is it part of the mother or part of the baby? If an expectant mother had somatic awareness where would it end, where would it interface with the child in her womb? And if – you'd have to be crazy even to think about it, but if – the child had somatic awareness too, even in advance of being born, where would that somatic awareness end and interface?

There's no point even in wondering. That way lies madness, and we have to live in the real world. That stuff about evolving superhumanity was all just craziness or science fiction, best forgotten, best put right out of mind. You have to live a normal life. Dreams are just dreams and serpents can symbolize anything you want them to... anything at all.

Never tell a psychiatrist about your dreams and if you do, never mention the serpent. That's my advice. They can come and take you away, you know. It's not just a scare story. They really can come to take you away. It's best to act normal.

Our daughter's death was an accident. There's not an atom of doubt about that. Ginny was just talking to me, explaining how she'd got into such a state. She wasn't fighting against the baby. What happened was nobody's fault.

I never had to tell the psychiatrist anything. Nor did Ginny. When the baby was born dead, the whole business of official inquiries and At-Risk Registers just collapsed and came apart. When there wasn't a child to be protected any more, all its would-be protectors lost interest and moved off. Ginny came home, and got better. Life went on, as normal. It was our secret, and nobody else's.

It still is.

We'll be much more careful next time – much more. You have to be, don't you? I mean, there are so many ways that parents can screw up their children, even without meaning to.

Too many, perhaps.

One day, it'll be different. One day, we'll have it all under control. In the meantime, we'll just have to do the best we can.

Brian Stableford has had novella-length stories published in *Analogs*, *Asimov's* and *Interzone* in the past year (one of them Hugo Award-nominated) and has also had three novels (*The Carnival of Destruction*, *Firefly* and *Serpent's Blood*) and a non-fiction book (*Algebraic Fantasies and Realistic Romances*) out within the past 12 months – plus short stories, essays and reviews all over the place. He never rests.

Arielle dreaded Spring. For most folk the coming of rain and warmth, the new flowers and the prospect of planting were the only things that kept them alive through the long Turkistan winters. The blooming of the tulips she hated particularly because she always felt something turn in her bones when she saw a red tulip. *There is my death*, she thought.

Most of the tulips in Turkistan bloomed white, but those in Bokhara bloomed blood-red; and it was said that to the north (near Mongol lands) there was a valley where tulips bloomed in many colours. When people mentioned this place they made a sign to ward off evil. They never spoke of that hidden place around Arielle's father for he would rage and smash them to the ground, but often they spoke of it to Arielle as though waiting for a certain reaction.

When Arielle was very young her mother had gone away. Arielle's father never spoke of her, and her grandmother only said, "She was not like us."

Arielle's father was a good and kind man. But for her there was a special rule that no other children had to obey. Arielle was forbidden to kindle a fire, or even stand or sit close to one. She could never visit her father at his forge, and during the winter her father would heat bricks and carry them to her bed. But she was often very very cold. She did not know why her father had this superstition, but she came to regard the warmth of spring, the heat of the fire, and the blood-red blooming of the tulips with both fear and expectation. For often what we fear most is what we most desire.

When she was 15 there was a boy, Yuri. Yuri's father traded with the Mongols, and often came to her father to shoe his horses. Yuri had raven hair and pale-dark skin and eyes of lambent amber. He had wonderful tales of magic he had seen in the north – of lamas who could rise in the air or be in two places at once. Soon she learned to sneak out of her house and meet Yuri – long walks, long talks, long cuddling, under the steel moonlight of Turkistan. Their romance grew through the summer, and most of Arielle's strange fears faded.

But one fall night, when the frosty air blew from the Asian steppes, Yuri suggested they light a small fire to supplement the warmth that came from their bodies. Arielle was a little afraid of breaking her father's rule, but hadn't she already felt the delicious intoxication that forbidden fruit brings? Yuri gathered some straw and twigs, and began striking his knife against a quartzite pebble. He asked her to shelter the fire-to-be with her hands. She knelt on the cold ground and cupped her hands around the tinder. The spark took and the flame began to burn. But it was not like other fires.

It burned bright green.

Yuri looked at her in horror, and then ran into the night. By the next day it seemed that everyone in Bokhara knew. They had gathered in front of her house. Several men were yelling at her father that he had held out on them.

"You are a good blacksmith, Aquil Bektash, but

The FLOWER MAN

Don Webb

there are other good blacksmiths in Bokhara. We need a weird woman. Give her to us or we will take her from you."

Arielle's father looked as if he wanted to fight them. She could see his biceps and hands clench and clench. But there were too many. Suddenly he went limp, as though his bones had been taken out of him.

"She is yours," he said.

The crowd rushed into the house and pulled her into the streets. She thought they were going to take her as she had seen men take women in the streets, and she was sick and tried to faint. But they carried her to the house of Masul Adi. Masul's wife Marion had been wasting away with yellow fever. They carried her into the sickroom with its hot and cloying smell.

"Heal her," they said.

Then they left and she did now know what to do. She tried bathing Marion with a rag. She asked at the door for milk and those herbs which she had seen her father's mother use for healing. These were brought and she administered them. But they did no good. So she went to the door and told Masul Adi that she had done all that she could. She was tired and wanted to go home. But Masul Adi, whom she had known all her life, pulled his rusty scimitar from its sheath.

"You will stay and heal her, weird woman."

Arielle saw in his eyes that he would kill her. She wondered if some malicious djinn had taken away the sweet village that she knew and replaced it with this clever counterfeit, this world of horrors. She went and sat by the sick woman's bed. She was like a princess in the tales of the Thousand Nights and One Night – commanded to do an impossible task or wait for morning and the chopper's block.

She thought of the strange miracle of the fire. She hadn't connected it with herself – she thought Yuri had run off because the green flame was an omen. Perhaps the flame was the answer.

Arielle pulled some straw from Marion's mattress. Then she lit one of the straws from the oil lamp over the head of the bed.

She cupped her hands around the straw, and as before the flame burned green. Suddenly she felt faint – she felt something flowing out of her into the flame. Perhaps she would die; well, this was a delicious swooning way to die, unlike Adi's scimitar. Suddenly Arielle felt more than just this strange invisible substance being drawn into the green flame. She felt *herself* drawn into the fire.

Suddenly she could see the room through the green fire. She saw Marion's body covered in a yellowish slime. She rose in her body of flame. With long flaming fingers she tore away the nasty slime and slapped it against the white walls. It was hard work pulling the heavy nasty substance away, and when she was finished she fell backwards.

Her father woke her up. She was in her room. Her bed. Tired and weak.

"What happened?" she asked.

"You healed Adi's wife." He sounded very sad.

"I don't know what I did."

"You have a gift to work with other people's energies. It is called *baraka*. It is an empowering grace. It runs in family lines. Your mother had the power, but we hid it."

"Why did you hide it?"

"The others. The sick and wounded of the world will suck you dry. There is a way to conserve the power, but you have to pass through a terrible initiation, and even after that you must live among the Sarmouni."

"Who are they?"

"A terrible brotherhood who live in the valley of flowers. Your mother escaped from them, yet somehow their vast powers called her back like iron dust to lodestone. I wanted to keep you for myself – not to see you take the yellow and black veil of the Sarmouni."

She was tired and returned to sleep.

In the months that came, the villagers never let her rest. They would cart her off to the houses of the sick. Always she was surrounded by death and dying. Each soul she pulled back to life cost her a slice of vital energy. Her eyes became dull, and grey hairs began to appear. She saw herself in the mirror and saw an old woman. She was 17. If she didn't get away soon, she would die.

The leader of the village of Bokhara decided to sell her services – as though she were an expensive concubine. She rode in a lavishly outfitted couch to the homes of wealthy dying men from Balkh to Samarkand. She tried to escape twice, so they put a constant guard on her.

Once in Balkh she healed a scholar. Snow kept them in the city, and the grateful scholar visited her as she recuperated the next day. He read her his poems and told her many things.

"Do you know of the Sarmouni?" she asked.

"Sarmouni is an old Persian word for bees. That ancient brotherhood began collecting wisdom when Babylon fell. They taught that wisdom is like honey. There is only so much of it to be had and it must be guarded carefully. They're a myth of course."

"Of course," she echoed. "But where in the myths do these wise brothers dwell?"

"Some say in the valley of the flowers. Others say in Kuni-Zagh, which means Raven's Corners. But they are an accursed brotherhood for they shut themselves off from the universe. They say the world isn't ready for wisdom."

She asked the scholar many more questions on every topic she could think of so he would not remember her questions on the Sarmouni.

When she returned to Bokhara, she demanded to see the mayor. She told him that her powers were fading, and it would be best if he only sold her to clients that she chose.

The mayor protested, but she continued explaining her decline and he began to see the disappearance of his piles of silver. So he agreed.

Then she said that in order to keep her powers she had to be surrounded by flowers and fresh air. Big windows were to be cut in her room and an endless supply of cut flowers should be brought to her. The mayor started to object, but realized that there had been so few weird women – who really knew what their requirements were?

Then Arielle made her third request – that she be tutored in Old Persian.

This was strictly foolishness. No one taught women. The mayor refused.

So she took to her bed feigning madness. On the third day of her wild muttering a tutor arrived and within a month she could read and write and recite simple verses.

Thus Arielle discovered the power of pretending to have knowledge, planned her escape to Raven's Corners, and discovered the magic of reading and writing.

Still however she was forced to serve the village ill. Still she aged and weakened at an incredible rate. Every day despite her great fatigue she went to the windows and sang songs of her sad fate. She sang to the bees in hope they would sing to the human Sarmouni.

A year passed and she nearly died from pneumonia. No one heals the healer. She turned down most, but not all of the mayor's requests that she travel. She spent such time as she could with her father, but he treated her as one already dead. And why not? Did she not look as old as his mother?

In the middle of a hard winter, they came. Four men and four women dressed in yellow and black. She watched them carom into the village, almost bouncing off walls and skidding about at strange angles.

They were following the flight of bees.

They came to her house and she waved to them and shouted instructions on how to find the mayor. They went off gaily, and happiness bloomed in her. Soon she would be among her own kind. Whatever hardships they might put her through were better than dying for the village and the mayor's greed.

Within the hour, the mayor came to her and asked – almost begged – her to go to Raven's Corners. The strangely dressed travellers had paid in rich yellow gold. Trying not to betray her eagerness, she slowly consented. She packed her things and waited for the

village guard who always escorted her.

When they joined up with the travellers, one of the women gave her a kindly look and motioned for her not to speak. They set off through the snow. About an hour out of Bokhara, one of the men offered the guard a drink from his canteen. The guard slurped down the thin yogurt, then he turned very pale and fainted.

Arielle said, "I am so happy that you have rescued me."

The woman who had signed to her before, slapped her hard across the cheek.

The woman said, "You will not speak unless spoken to."

The men seemed to take this as a sort of sign and rapidly blindfolded her, and tied her arms together behind her back. The woman worked a rope around her middle and then pulled her along like a reluctant jack ass. Her arms hurt almost immediately from the rope, and in the first hour she fell several times until she learned to walk blindly – feeling the upcoming rises and falls in the tugs of the rope. There were breaks for food and water, but these strange smiling folk never spoke and she began to wonder if she was indeed going to a kinder place. Twice she tried to speak and was rewarded with blows for her effort. At night they tied her to a stake. It was very very cold; although she could not see, she believed that they did not light a fire for themselves.

It took three days to come to Raven's Corners. Arielle did not know her arms and legs could hurt so much, and she still moved. The woman who was in charge of her took off her blindfold and said, "Remember everything you see. Everything here is magical – full of meaning to help you change your essence."

There was a village in the centre of the valley, around its stone buildings fields and fields of tulips whose green leaves had just begun to peek through the snow. The village consisted of eight long stone buildings hexagonal in cross section arranged around a central building shaped as a truncated pyramid. Around the eight (and separating them from the tulip fields) stood a ring of mulberry trees, leafless in the winter. The doors and shutters of the long buildings shone with well polished brass, but the doors on each of the four sides of the truncated pyramid were of dark wood. The long buildings glistered whiter than the snow, whereas the pyramid had been painted a dull red.

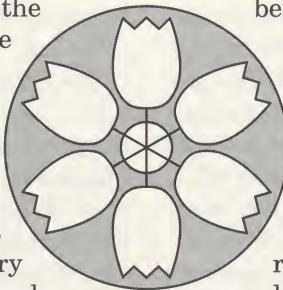
As they drew closer to the community, the women undid the rope and the men freed her arms. It felt so good to be free. The community was a hive of activity – despite the cold. Through the open windows she could see into each of the long buildings. One building was full of weavers, another carpet makers, another of people learning to dance, the next people illustrating books in the Persian fashion, another full of cooks and kitchen boys preparing the meals for the community, another housed woodcarvers, and next to it people were busy at gold- and silver-smithing, and

in the eighth people learning mathematics. Outside people were polishing the brass, others were repainting the pyramid, and she heard the cries of shepherds bringing hay to the caves further down the valley where sheep were kept from the frost.

When she drew closer, she saw that over each door of the long buildings was a white wooden disc painted with six tulips in the shape of a snowflake.

"Remember this sign. It brings peace," said the woman.

The woman seemed so full of warmth when she spoke, it was hard to connect her with the harsh blows. She hustled Arielle off to the kitchen. Arielle was longing for a meal, since she was both tired and hungry. But instead half the kitchen staff busied themselves stripping her and pouring very hot water into a great brass pot. They dumped her in and washed her rather roughly – Arielle was quite sure that she would have no skin left at the end of the process. She had seldom been completely naked before, and certainly never naked in front of men, most of whom scarcely looked up from their kitchen tasks. The women pulled her out and dried her off roughly. Then a very old woman began cutting off her hair with dull shears. The process seemed to pull out as many hairs as were cut. They then shaved off the rest. Someone held up a mirror for her to see her bald and bloody scalp, and she fainted dead away.



The next day she awoke wearing a simple one-piece garment made from white wool. She stood out in the sea of black and yellow garments everyone else wore. The woman in charge of her took her first to the common dining room (which was half of the kitchen complex – just as half of all the other long buildings were dormitories). After a bowl of porridge, Arielle was hustled off to the weavers' room. Arielle's mistress showed her how and what to weave with a very few words and gestures. At first it was very hard, and her fingers and eyes ached all the time. She thought she would never achieve the fluid ease with which the others worked. She cried a little, but when she noticed that her tears were a source of merriment for the other workers, she withheld them and bent toward her task with new determination.

At night the woman in charge of her took her into the dormitories, where she was allowed to read, but not speak. There were many books – mostly in Persian such as Ali El-Hujwiri's *The Treasury of the Mysteries*. Some books were in Greek, Sanskrit, and Arabic. Of the latter a large book entitled *Al Azif* seemed to garner special reverence. Arielle's mistress actually took the book from the hands of an older sister and gave it to Arielle. Arielle protested that she didn't read Arabic, but the woman told her to study the diagrams, especially a nine-angled figure she called the *Nast Rohz*, or Flower Seal.

"Put it into the deep hidden places of your mind," she said, "Much truth springs from it."

Arielle grew accustomed to the hard work, silence and reading. She felt herself growing stronger every

day. She was not surprised when she saw her raven hair reflected in a shiny brass shutter. She felt a burst of love for these strange silent people, especially for her mistress, who was clearly helping her rebuild herself. She felt part of the cycle of things again. The mulberry trees were putting on leaves and the tulips were beginning to form buds.

One afternoon three of the shepherds carried in a fourth. They had been taking the sheep out to graze on the new grass, when a boulder loosened from the valley walls by ice had fallen and crushed both his legs. Everyone in the community broke into a frenzy of activity. Some cleaned the man's legs, others gathered firewood, and others still began singing in high-pitched insect-like voices. The men quickly assembled a great pile of firewood near the south door of the truncated pyramid. As night fell, a great blaze was kindled. Everyone in the community formed a semicircle around the fire.

Almost instantly the flame burned a beautiful emerald colour. Arielle felt her essential self drawn into the blaze. It wasn't a slow drawn-out affair as when Arielle had healed the villagers. Within the fire she felt the presence of the others. Like a vast alien machine, they worked in harmony on the broken body of the shepherd. When the working was over, Arielle felt refreshed rather than exhausted.

She screwed up her courage to ask her teacher about this.

The woman said, "We work in reciprocal maintenance. Energy spent on our own kind renews us." The woman gave her a very kindly smile, and then almost as an afterthought slapped her.

Each day the tulips grew nearer and nearer to blooming. Then one morning it seemed as if every single blossom had burst forth at once. The sides of the valley rioted in colour: yellows, reds, oranges, purples, whites, pinks and every colour and combination in between.

There was no breakfast that morning.

The woman in charge of Arielle told her, "Today is the day you become one of us or die trying. Hurry up, there is much to do."

One of the oldest women opened the north doors of the truncated pyramid. Arielle had never seen the pyramid opened, and sought to look inside, but her mistress grabbed her by the side of the head and turned her glance away. The old woman brought out rack after rack of curiously curved knives. These were passed among the community. Everyone then went toward the tulip fields. They began gathering the blossoms — cutting them with the knives. So great was the speed of their chopping that the very air seemed to turn green as the living sap fell on all and everything in a fine mist. By midday they had robbed the valley of her beautiful coat, and had made great piles of tulips in front of each of the doors of the pyramid.

Then the woman in charge of Arielle went up to her and told her that there would be no lunch or supper either. She further said, "I must blindfold you so that your mind is free of distracting images

by the time of the ceremony. But you are allowed to ask me one question before I do."

Arielle thought for a moment about all the changes in herself that Raven's Corners had allowed her to work. She said, "You have been so good to me. You saved my life, your smiles enabled me to withstand the harsh laws of this place. To whom do I owe this debt? What is your name?"

"I am Rabia Bektash. I am your mother."

Then she placed the blindfold over Arielle's eyes.

It seemed a long, long wait for the ceremony. Arielle had fallen asleep and had many vivid dreams of abstract angular patterns composed of the colours of the tulips. She was in a place where the laws were different than those of mankind. Yet they were her laws, the hidden innate patterns of her soul. Or perhaps this world of angles was the world that mankind might someday have, if they could just awaken. She was on the verge of understanding everything, when her mother shook and woke her up.

"Come," her mother said. "It is time."

The community was entering the truncated pyramid — each of its four doors flung wide. Gone were the piles of tulips, but Arielle didn't have much time to ponder over this. As she passed into the cold darkness of the pyramid, she saw that a black wooden disc bearing the Nast Rohz in silver had been hung over the door. Inside the pyramid people were circling a great hole then stepping into it. Around the sides of the round hole was a spiral staircase leading further down than the eye could see. Arielle made the circle round the hole thrice and then began to descend. It was dark (almost pitch black), and there was no banister to protect one from falling into the depths of the centre well. It was necessary to be very awake as they circled ever deeper into Earth.

They spiralled down for a very long time, until they came to a grotto lit by two pillars of green flame. The flames were wet and cold and thoroughly unnatural. The floor was as soft as though many rugs were laid there. Suddenly Arielle realized they were walking atop several inches of tulips.

The oldest man and the oldest woman began to sing in that strange insect-like language Arielle had heard the night they had healed the shepherd. The rest of the group took up the song. The song rang off the walls of the grotto in a peculiar way, setting up a vibration that seemed to shake every bone in Arielle's body.

One of the pillars became very dark (almost black) and the other very light (almost white). A spark flew from the dark pillar to the light pillar and as it flew it drew a strand of fire behind it. Then the spark began flying up and down and back and forth creating a flame web. Soon it had traced out the Nast Rohz. The figure hung like a spider web between the two pillars.

From one of the angles came a small flame (sometimes green, sometimes burning in the many different colours of the tulips). As it traversed each of the nine angles it grew. Sometimes it seemed to be an animal, sometimes a fantastic being, sometimes a

collection of geometrical shapes. By the time it reached the last angle it had the shape of a man. Then it flung itself from the web onto the tulip-covered floor, and it became a man.

Naked save for a green cloak that flowed from his shoulders, his skin was all the different colours of the tulips. He stood taller than any of them – perhaps a good seven feet.

He began to dance.

It wasn't a dance like any she had seen before. It was a dance to the glory of desire. Sometimes he would try a very intricate step or a very difficult leap, and fall. Each of the falls stood for a setback. He would get up again and again, his face a mask of determination. Each time the dance grew more ambitious as he almost flew through the flickering shadows of the grotto, dancing in brilliance and darkness to the glory of desire.

Pictures began to form in Arielle's mind of mankind's many achievements and of the possibility of a splendour-filled future ahead. But she saw the fallings too – the wars, the intolerance. Her mind was completely filled and stimulated. But at the same time her emotions began a different sort of movement. She desired the flower man as she had never wanted another. This was like the feeling Yuri had awakened in her, but a thousand times more intense. She looked at his green manhood, smooth and curved like a tulip about to blossom, and felt a lasciviousness pound in her blood that she would never have guessed lay hidden inside her. Yet at the same time she feared the flower man. He was of a different world, perhaps a

world forbidden to mankind. If she gave herself to him, she would be giving herself to the unknown: and the unknown is absolutely terrifying. A third force was manifest in her as well. Arielle began to sway and then to dance. Every fibre of her body longed for the graceful elegance that the flower man had. Her body wanted to dance – to be – in this strange new way.

She felt as if she was splitting into three parts. Her mind was going one way, her emotions another, and her body a third. Then her mother stepped up and whispered into her ear, "The secret of magic is to transform the magician."

Suddenly Arielle realized that everything she had seen in Raven's Corners revolved around the secret of harmony. Harmony. All three movements became one and Arielle saw all and everything as a great dance of three partners, the phenomena of life with its lusts and fears, the phenomena of intelligence with its power to order and change, and the physical world which served as the dance hall. With this knowledge, she became the flower man's equal, and he danced over to her and enfolded her in his green mystery.

(Dedicated to Thuban Abulfaiz Dhu'l Nun who helped with the spelling.)

Don Webb wrote "The Surgeons" (*Interzone* 97). He lives in Austin, Texas, one of the main intellectual – or smartass – "nodes" of American sf and fantasy (all the others are much more northerly – San Francisco, Minneapolis and, of course, New York).

LOCUS

28th Year of Publication
17-Time Hugo Winner

The information magazine for science fiction readers.

"I recommend it to anyone needing a broad, accurate, non-partisan view of the SF scene."

Michael Moorcock

"LOCUS manages to be broad and deep at the same time. I appreciate the continuous contact with worldwide science fiction, the many viewpoints in the reviews, the lively and intelligent writing."

Orson Scott Card

"LOCUS is still the only magazine I read from cover to cover. It is also the only magazine which makes me drop everything when it arrives..."

Arthur C. Clarke

"Without LOCUS we would be groping around in the dark. But LOCUS is there, shining light into all the dark corners."

Robert A. Heinlein

"There is no way for anyone fascinated by science fiction to get out of reading LOCUS. It is the *Time* magazine and Walter Winchell of the field. It misses nothing, tells everything, keeps you abreast and in the swim, and I wouldn't be without it."

Isaac Asimov

"LOCUS is indispensable."

Robert Silverberg

Reviews of over 25 new or upcoming books each month.

Interviews with leading writers of science fiction, fantasy and horror.

Forthcoming Books from British and American publishers listed quarterly.

Enclosed is: \$ _____

New Renewal

Name _____

Address _____

Country _____

Credit Card Type: _____ Exp. Date: _____

 Credit Card Number: _____

 Phone: _____

 Cardholder's Signature _____

Subscriptions

Credit card orders will be charged at \$US rates. UK subscribers may pay by £ cheque (£ rate includes a conversion charge). Make cheques payable to:

Locus Publications,
P.O. Box 13305,
Oakland CA 94661, USA

For credit card orders:
Phone: 010-1-510-339-9198
Fax: 010-1-510-339-8144

\$26.00 for 6 Issues (Sea Mail)
\$45.00 for 12 Issues (Sea Mail)
\$84.00 for 24 Issues (Sea Mail)
\$67.00 for 12 Issues (Air Mail)
\$114.00 for 24 Issues (Air Mail)

\$20.00 for 6 Issues (Sea Mail)
\$35.00 for 12 Issues (Sea Mail)
\$66.00 for 24 Issues (Sea Mail)
\$53.00 for 12 Issues (Air Mail)
\$90.00 for 24 Issues (Air Mail)



Nick Lowe

MUTANT POPCORN

While its makers may feel with some satisfaction that the receipts speak for themselves, you can easily see why it took 15 years and the biggest movie ever to haul Michael Crichton's *Congo* to the screen at all. A product of his doldrum years at the end of the 70s, when Crichton's ambitions were still largely directorial, *Congo* is by some way his silliest, dullest, and most self-parodic novel: doorstep slices of sonorous exposition sandwiching mechanical suspense routines, in a world where men are humourless monomaniacal bores and women are less rounded versions of the men. Its attractive jump-off notion – to update *King Solomon's Mines* for the darker world of international capitalism, postcolonial African politics, and Crichton's misanthropic obsession with the Faustian control of nature – dissipates in a tiresome narrative of plodding from one techno/jungle set piece to the next in quest of a ludicrous lost city of evil gorillas. And leaving the movie this late creates problems of its own, given that all Crichton's novels are date-stamped by their very attempt to be topical and prophetic – as with *Congo*'s (then quite prescient) intimations of SDI, its rather less successful prognoses of the 1979 Ugandan revolution and the Kigani uprising in Zaire, and what now reads as a disheartening reminder that the mountain gorilla was regarded as on the brink

of extinction when there were 3,000 left in the wild (some five times the 1995 figure).

Well, John Patrick Shanley's brief as screenwriter has clearly been to do whatever it takes with this dolorous material to recreate the magic that was *Jurassic Park*. As such, it's a remarkably professional piece of re-upholstering, even managing a passable duplication of the *Jurassic* cast (the blonde one, the dashing boffin, the fixated tycoon, the eccentric scholar, and the inevitable – though this time simian – techno-savvy juvenile). Since the one character with any depth or interest in the novel was Amy the Ameslan gorilla, the biggest slice of ingenuity and budget has gone into cinematizing her appeal, with her front end anatomically customized for max anthropomorphic facial cuteness, and her speech-synthesizing translator suit a sly touch of daft invention the solemnly realistic Crichton would never have dared. But with no expense spared on electronic puppetry, locations, and gorilla suits, economies have had to be made elsewhere; so this is one of those movies politely dubbed "ensemble" pieces, where none of the no-star cast has enough clout to get their characters properly written. ("Are you for real?" asks Laura Linney of Joe Don Baker's cartoon tycoon. "Are you human?" "I can be human later!" snaps back JDB, in a regrettably undeliverable hostage to fortune.) Some perfunctory relation-

ships of filiation and affiance have been inserted as shorthand substitutes for motivation otherwise squeezed from the action schedules ("Why are you going to Africa?" "To find something I lost", &c.), but in general it falls on the astounding insertion of Tim Curry's "Romanian philanthropist" to carry an entire film's worth of acting in a single performance – a solution rather vitiated by the fact that none of his dialogue is audible beneath the surf of audience hilarity every time he opens his mouth.

To be fair to *Congo*-the-summer-movie, both Shanley's replotting and Frank Marshall's direction have done their best to ensure there isn't time between the relentless set pieces for very much of anything, and as check-brain-with-attendant rollercoasters go it does more or less keep its momentum going. The slimmed-down storyline has evidently left a cutting-room floor thigh-deep in subplots and supporting parts – you have to go back to the novel to see what lies behind the vestigial "second expedition" in the release cut – but at least, unlike the ever-earnest Crichton, it's not embarrassed to be idiotically plotted, nauseatingly sentimental, or simply tongue-in-cheek. Needless to say, as an essay on the relations of affinity and estrangement, exploitation and primeval fear between humans and their pongid cousins, the movie version is a lot more concerned over saying the right thing ("The notion of the killer

ape may be politically incorrect, but that does not mean it's untrue") than pursuing the implications (with none of the novel's reservations, for example, about the effects of releasing Washoe's children into the wild). But with Crichton for once firmly detached from creative control, there's little incentive for anyone involved to take his portentous finger-wagging seriously.

The one really offensive strand in *Congo* is its crass, exploitative, xenophobic representation of Africa — that faraway landmass of adorable endangered mammals menaced by savage and/or expendable darkies, where bush clothes stay magically clean and pressed, and the soundtrack throbs with the gruesome strains of Jerry Goldsmith trying to sound "tribal." (Do not attempt to make out the lyrics of the end-title song. If you hang around too long, they start to become hideously audible.) Most uneasily, updating the novel obliges the movie willy-nilly to find a Hollywood-friendly way of dealing with Rwanda, leading to a bizarre central section where the highly specific geography of Kenya, Tanzania and the Zairean Virungas cedes suddenly to scenes of high-octane carnage evasively captioned "Central Africa" and dialogue references to "that country" (Uganda in the novel, but that was then). "Whenever the leadership of one of these little central African countries comes into question, they just murder everyone," is local expert Ernie Hudson's breezy gloss, as our chums take off for tourist- and filmcrew-friendly Tanzania and the sun and giraffes come out again. Crichton himself, from whom wilfully-provocative incorrect thinking is routinely expected, might have got away with this by dint of doing it on purpose. *Congo*, having renounced not only incorrectness but pretty much any other kind of thinking, has left itself rather less space for excuse.

Christina Ricci as Kat Harvey is befriended by Casper, the friendly ghost



Above and facing page: Dylan Walsh as Peter Elliot and Laura Linney as Karen Ross in *Congo*

For some, the subtle relationship of mutual exploitation between Hollywood and Crichton — and to lesser degrees Stephen King, John Grisham, or Tom Clancy — may suggest some overblown questions of its own. "When," asks a voice in John Carpenter's *In the Mouth of Madness*, "does fiction become religion — and are his fans dangerous?" But the question is actually posed in reference to "Sutter Cane," a fictitious downmarket clone of King whose supernatural potboilers are being ghosted by the Great Old Ones to loosen their readers' hold on reality and turn the entire movie-going human race into paranoid schizophrenics via the film version of Cane's final, most unhinging novel. Only hardbitten insurance investigator and lifelong non-reader Sam Neill is sufficiently imagination-free to resist the siren call of *In the Mouth of Madness* (for yes, this is one of those recursive meta-fictional *mise en abîme* type things), and strikes off to spend his middle act in a Lovecraftian rewrite of *Groundhog*

Day in "The Pickford Motel" (nudge) in creepiest upstate New Hampshire, where he can ponder at leisure whether the randomly weird goings-on around him are reality, hoax, theme park, fiction, movie, or madness.

Mostly, it's great stuff. Every two or three years Carpenter's medication momentarily wears off and he makes a completely unglued, concept-led near-artfilm like *Prince of Darkness* or the career high *They Live*, before being recaptured by the authorities and feigning rehabilitation with some vacuous twaddle like *Memoirs of an Invisible Man*. For this latest and barmiest mouth-foaming exercise, he's picked up a strange script (by Martin de Luca) that it's hard to imagine anyone else touching, and shaped it into an aptly incoherent and deranged reflection on the compulsive power of genre horror in its contrasting incarnations as word and image. Ironically, it's actually at its weakest when the imagery becomes most explicit and special makeup takes over from implication; the eeriest moments are those where seemingly-innocuous images get slowed down and overlaid with the director's familiar bass-heavy metallic-pad score. But then part of the film's argument is that solitary reading has an insidious power of imagination and suggestion that movies have to be content merely to mimic; and since the very premise is that nothing makes any sense, it's hard to be much bothered by a shambling structure, a feeble ending, and a free-associating storyline that seems to have been improvised under hypnosis. Best of all, fans of the alternate Sam Neill (the demonic dark prince of overacting, no relation to the blandly ubiquitous leading man of the same name and identity) get the absolute works here, a performance that starts in a padded cell and moves on up from there. It's good to see playing a Crichton lead hasn't spoiled him for more complex characterizations.



And it's true, you know, that a casual choice of reading can warp your life forever. At the height of my primary-school comics-swapping frenzy, I made the mistake of pulling out an issue of *Casper the Friendly Ghost*. "What's wrong?" I asked of a classmate who up until seconds before had been my blood brother unto death. "That's a wee girls' book," he hissed, taking a step or two back with the rest. It was then that I realized, with sinking clarity, that there was a lot of tacit knowledge about gender going around that I was never going to be one of the sharpest at picking up, and that I might as well have turned up to break wearing a ballet frock. For yes, for reasons too deeply implicit to analyze, *Casper* is incontestably a wee girls' book; and *Casper* the family movie has taken this truth as the anchor point for its unexpectedly bold and thoughtful act of revisionist repositioning, with more than half an eye on the *Beetlejuice* cartoons' franchise. Written by two people called Sherri and Deanna, *Casper* sets out to relaunch a frankly exhausted character for a wider age-band and a more precocious, sophisticated generation of girlies. Christina Ricci, still just about short enough and large in the head for this last attempt to pass herself off as a twelve-year-old, displaces our spooky chum at the centre

of the film in everything but title, as death becomes an arch metaphor for the passage into adolescence. The film's message is a reassuring one to all those pre-teens, and their parents, at once attracted and scared by the initiatory hoops of first party, first date, and the arrival of hormones: like death, adolescence is reversible, so you don't have to give up your presexual friendships with boys *qua* playmates. And if you don't have any friends, no need for counselling, because you can always get an imaginary one.

The thing you have to be prepared to put up with about *Casper* is that it's one of those movies that takes as read the therapization of everything. To a limited degree, it does endear itself by venturing a modest peep of irony about this in Bill Pullman's new-age counsellor to the "living-impaired" (great cardigans, by the way), but somewhat weakens it by endorsing it all as true. "All ghosts," he explains, "have unfinished business; that's why they don't cross over." So *Casper* may be a friendly ghost, but that doesn't mean he's a happy one. When Ricci dares to pop the one question that never got asked in the old days, *Casper* has to admit he can't remember anything about his life. "Gosh," she regrettably fails to suggest. "Maybe you were ABUSED." But it does turn out that even the friendliest

ghost you know has unfinished business of his own, and that nobody in a family movie gets out of family therapy.

If you can bear with this, and the great gobs of sentiment that attend it, *Casper* is a more complex and grown-up movie than one would have expected anyone to be able to squeeze from the material, with some modestly astute observation of adolescence and some deft reflection, not all of it ironic, on popular attitudes to the three great constants of death, therapy and hormones. There are plenty of pretty dreadful things: though it all moves along at a decent clip, it's terribly unfunny (packed with expensive, flat-falling movie in-jokes to try and persuade the accompanying adults they're welcome), very unevenly played (strange now to remember that Eric Idle was once the funniest man alive, and that Cathy Moriarty wasn't always Faye Dunaway), scarred by gaping discontinuities in the plotlines, and badly let down by an unappealing hero reanimated in a guise more sinister than friendly. But Ricci, as ever, is spookily good, and it's fascinating to spy on her moment of transition from cute-looking child star with enormous eyes to weird-looking teen vamp with enormous forehead. A strange and possibly wonderful career awaits.

Nick Lowe

BOLDLY VOYAGING

Neil Jones

The pilot episode of *Star Trek: Voyager*, fourth in the line of *Trek* television series, premiered on US television on January 16th, 1995. The time was right for yet another new incarnation of *Star Trek*. The *Next Generation* was leaving television to replace Captain Kirk and the original crew on the cinema screen, and Paramount, owner of the *Trek* franchise, wanted a new series to anchor their new TV network, UPN.

Its co-creators were Rick Berman, Michael Piller and Jeri Taylor. Berman, the number-one figure in the current *Trek* firmament, took over the reins on *TNG* from Gene Roddenberry, while Piller joined the series during the third season to head the writing team: as well as guiding *TNG* to both critical and financial success, the two already had one *Trek* spin-off behind them, *Star Trek: Deep Space 9*. Joining them was Taylor, who had proven herself running the writing team on *TNG* while Piller concentrated on *DS9*.

One option was to stick with a proven formula and put a new crew aboard another starship called the *Enterprise*. Also, Jonathan Frakes (Riker) and Marina Sirtis (Deanna Troi) were keen to

continue trekking and a newly-promoted Captain Riker with a mostly new crew was also a possibility. But although the new series would be set aboard a starship – *Voyager* – to their credit Berman *et al* decided on a fresh scenario.

With the basic premise established and the regular roles agreed, the critical casting process got underway. From the first, in true *Trek* tradition, the crew was to be a mix of race and gender. The lead role was the captain: Berman and Piller had already gone boldly by casting a black actor, Avery Brooks, as the *DS9* commander, Benjamin Sisko; now, despite reported unease from Paramount, they wanted to put a woman into the command role. After a long hunt, the part eventually went to Genevieve Bujold – but, two days into the shoot, Bujold decided a job in weekly television was not for her after all and there was a frantic search for a replacement before Kate Mulgrew got the part. Fortunately, Mulgrew's performance fully vindicates the decision to put a woman on the bridge. Her character, Kathryn Janeway, has warmth and sensitivity, but is also competent, decisive, and tough: a captain who can stand beside Kirk, Picard and Sisko.

The pilot episode, entitled "Caretaker," has proved a successful launchpad for the series and the new set of characters. However, while entertaining, it also has its share of flaws – most surprising given the track records of its co-creators.

The all-action opening is extremely effective, despite being modelled all too clearly on *Star Wars*: one small ship hurtles across screen, hotly pursued by a much bigger Cardassian ship. As the two vessels exchange phaser fire, and the situation worsens for the smaller ship, text scrolls up on screen, informing us that its crew (three of whom will be series regulars) are members of a resistance group, the Maquis, opposed to the Federation's treaty with the Cardassians and regarded as outlaws by Starfleet. Skilful piloting gets it into the so-called Badlands, but then something unknown looms ahead...

Cut to a penal colony in New Zealand, where Captain Janeway finds Tom Paris, a hotshot pilot with a history – dishonourably discharged from Starfleet, he subsequently hired on with the Maquis but was captured on his very first mission. Paris (played by Robert Duncan MacNeil) agrees to help Janeway hunt down his former Maquis

comrades. MacNeil played an almost identical role in the *TNG* episode "The First Duty," but the original character was thought a little too bad to follow Paris' redemption arc in the episode. Yes, it's clichéd and there's never any doubt that Paris will win himself a place in the crew, but it plays very successfully, nevertheless.

After New Zealand, it's off to Deep Space 9, jumping-off point for the Badlands, where we catch our first sight of a major character – the starship itself, reminiscent of the *Enterprise* but sleeker. Supposedly state-of-the-art, it's capable of cruising at warp nine point nine, has 15 decks, and is intended for a crew of 141.

Still on DS9, in Quark's Bar, we – and Paris – encounter another series regular, the likeable but naive young ensign, Harry Kim (Garret Wang), who is in the process of being conned by *DS9* regular Quark. This enjoyable crossover scene is likely to be the only one because immediately the key element of the new premise is put in place: *Voyager* enters the Badlands, runs into the same phenomenon as the Maquis ship – and abruptly finds itself on the other side of the galaxy. Our crew is stranded 70,000 light years from home, 70 years travel even at maximum warp speed – and will spend the rest of the series searching for a way home: not so much boldly going as boldly getting back.

So the new show will take place outside established *Trek*-space, the background of characters and alien races built up over decades. This was a brave move because *Voyager* cannot routinely draw on Starfleet, the Federation, or its uneasy allies, the Klingons; or on foes such as the Cardassians and Romulans, nor can it have crossovers with other *Trek* characters such as Quark. (For comparison, characters featured on *DS9* include Picard [in the pilot]; the Klingon sisters, Lursa and B'Etor; Q and his travelling companion Vash; the three Klingons from the original series, Kor, Kang and Koloth; and Riker's transporter twin.)

Voyager is badly damaged, and many of the crew are injured or dead, including the ship's medical team. The emergency holographic doctor (Robert Picardo) is called up, and immediately reminds everyone he is for short-term assistance only – which probably accounts for his total lack of bedside manner. But the very entertaining doctor is another series regular and is going to be on call a lot longer than in his design specifications.

Directly ahead of *Voyager* is an alien structure, promptly dubbed the Array, and beside it is the empty Maquis ship. Forcibly beamed over to the Array, the crew find themselves in the midst of a folksy American party straight out of a

Ray Bradbury story – and the episode, so crisp up to now, founders. After finding the missing Maquis, eerily suspended in a mysterious alien examination room, the party turns nasty. Eventually though, the two crews – Starfleet and Maquis – find themselves back on their vessels, with one missing crew-person apiece. Janeway and the Maquis captain, Chakotay, join forces to find them, and the second element of the premise slides into place: this temporary alliance will become permanent, and the Maquis – including the three characters introduced in the opening – will become part of *Voyager*'s crew under Janeway's command.

Starfleet personnel. This ruled out even Spock/McCoy-style banter and made writing for *TNG* a fraught process.

The story trundles along, never really gripping after the scenes on the Array. The *Voyager* crew quiz the Caretaker, the grumpy old Bradbury alien who runs it but he doesn't make a great deal of sense. They set off for a nearby planet in search of their two comrades and encounter Neelix, a Talaxian (Ethan Hawke), an interstellar jack-of-all-trades. Neelix has a Mohawk haircut, tufted facial hair, mottled skin, stubby teeth, and a mildly endearing personality. Taken aboard for his local knowledge, he leads Janeway into an

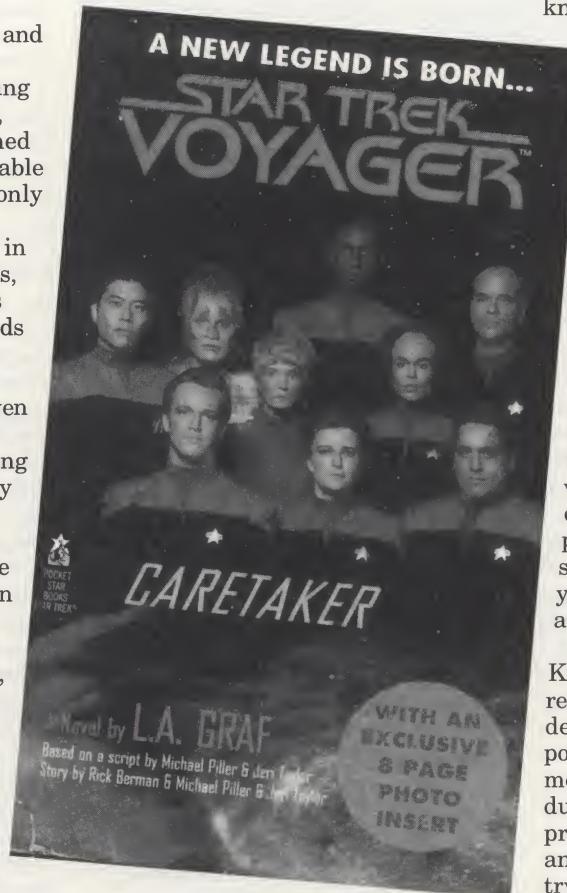
encounter with the new heavies, the rough-and-ready Kazon, and a young Ocampa girl called Kes (Jennifer Lien) who has emerged from a sealed world underground. Kes we will later discover is in the early part of a very brief (seven-year) lifespan. And there's a very strong hint that, later on (say mid-season) she's going to develop telepathic powers. Kes is the ninth and last of the full-time cast.

There is also a ridiculous plot-hinge about water being scarce/precious in this system and on the Ocampa planet in particular thanks to the Caretaker accidentally vaporizing it all when he arrived centuries ago and whose immense powers, while up to dragging starships across thousands of light years, can't manage a few ice asteroids.

Meanwhile, Torres and Ensign Kim, the two crew members not returned to their respective ships, are deep underground and feeling very poorly. They are being looked after by more of the friendly but extremely dull Ocampa, who the Caretaker has protected for hundreds of years. Kim and Torres spend much of the episode trying to escape to the surface, despite being told that their illness is invariably fatal. Fortunately for them, it promptly disappears totally from the script when they get back to *Voyager*.

The climax is another effective space battle with the Kazon, giving Chakotay some more gritted-teeth action, followed by an effective conclusion where Janeway addresses her newly-unified crew – and this section goes a long way towards redeeming the episode. It took *Next Generation* two whole seasons to find its form and, overall, despite the flaws, there's every reason to be optimistic about *Voyager*. The new characters are intriguing, and, together with the can-we-ever-get-home premise, promise the sort of strong episodes that *Trek* has delivered over the years. With luck, then, it'll be many seasons yet before *Voyager* finds its way back home.

Neil Jones



Two are representatives of familiar alien races: Tuvok (played by Tim Russ), logical and supposedly unemotional, is the first regular Vulcan since Spock; and there's a half-Klingon engineer, B'Elanna Torres (Roxann Biggs-Dawson), who has trouble keeping her temper in check, and, in contrast to Worf, the Klingon ultra-traditionalist, bitterly resents that side of her nature.

The third is the Maquis captain, Chakotay (Robert Beltran), a Native American (tribe deliberately unspecified) with a mysterious tattoo on his forehead. In the pilot, Chakotay gets more than his share of gritted-teeth action in the opening and the climax, and eventually becomes *Voyager*'s First Officer.

With seven of the regulars introduced, it's clear the co-creators have sidestepped Gene Roddenberry's edict prohibiting conflict between 24th-century

R.I.P. Roger Zelazny died on 14th June 1995 in a Santa Fe hospital, following a period of illness which he and his family had successfully concealed from most of the sf community. The cause of death was kidney failure following colon cancer. Zelazny was at the heart of the 1960s "US New Wave" – a deserving multiple Hugo and Nebula winner whose best fiction (like *Lord of Light*) still has a real mythic dazzle. Not so incidentally, he was liked by everyone who met him. He was only 58 and left us far too soon.

THE GRAVEYARD HEART

Octavia Butler was one of 24 winners of the 1995 US MacArthur grants, sometimes called the "genius awards." This means \$295,000 (in instalments) plus free health insurance; the money can be spent as she likes, being "intended to encourage and facilitate the recipient's work." A cheerfully unexpected "outside" recognition of a good sf writer... slightly clouded by bickering in the gossip circles along the lines of "ah, she only got it because she's black."

The 8th Earl of Clancarty, famous for UFO books under the byline Brinsley Le Poer Trench (his actual name, minus an initial "William Francis"), died in May aged 83. Perhaps his finest hour was the 1979 House of Lords UFO debate, whose transcript in *Hansard* sold out on the following day.

Julian Flood of titanic *Interzone* fame has stepped into Rob Holdstock's long-vacated shoes – writing scenarios and fiction for the *Elite* computer game, reincarnated as *Frontier*. JF brags of pillaging countless fictional sources including, at length, a Langford *IZ* story called "Blit": "this isn't ripoff, old chap, this is respectful quoting...."

Diana Wynne Jones underwent four hours of emergency spinal surgery at the end of May, and within days was sufficiently recovered to display "a filthy temper." She apparently has only two unreconstructed vertebrae left, and remains in some pain. Ouch.

Mike McQuay, US sf novelist (born 1949), died recently of a heart attack in his mid-40s.

Peter Nicholls confesses a certain embarrassment. Last year he loudly upbraided Australian sf fandom for its failure to shortlist him for the William Atheling Jr (James Blish) Award. After all, the Atheling is for sf criticism and he'd tossed off this little thing called *The SF Encyclopedia*. "I can get on to Hugo shortlists," he thundered, "but can't even get nominated in Australia!" This year there weren't enough nominations for any Atheling shortlist at all... so, possibly in self-defence, the

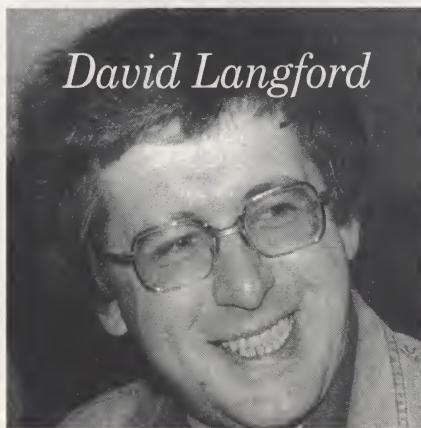
Ansible LINK

Australian national convention declared a special, ad-hoc Atheling award for Peter Nicholls.

Brian Stableford gloomily reports that, "sick of the hypocrisy involved in carefully disguising his sf novels as horror or fantasy trilogies in order to make them saleable," he defiantly outlined a six-part sf history of the next 1,500 years – trading on the approaching millennial celebrations, and incorporating such Stableford triumphs as the Hugo-nominated "Les Fleurs du Mal." From a publisher whose name is a Legend came the rapid death-knell: the Sales Department has decreed that "the UK sf market is now too small to be worth bothering with." Fantasy all the way now, chaps! Exit Stableford, worrying that "destiny has him marked down as a fantasy writer and he'd better stop prevaricating and bloody well get on with it..."

INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

Sincere Flattery of the Damned. The appearance of MGM's remake of *Village of the Damned*, based on John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos*, persuaded Thai sf/horror author S. P. Somtow to spill some beans about *Kawao Ti Bangphleng* – that is, *The Cuckoos of Bangphleng* by Thailand's erstwhile prime minister M. R. Kukrit, a Thai-language novelist of some note. Kukrit seemingly pinched almost the entire plot of Wyndham's book, transplanting it to a Thai village and changing the ending a bit (in a novel twist the alien kids are nobbled by Earthly bacteria; subsequently, in a fit of Buddhist tranquillity, they decide to go "home" via UFO). Unfortunately, the Thai film industry's first real assault on the international market was to be an adaptation of the Kukrit novel...



The Never-Ending SF

Encyclopedia. Grolier's spiffy CD-ROM edition has been re-announced for late August. John Clute promises: "75 author entries by me added, and a lot more than that by Peter Nicholls on everything else. Lots of new corrections, and (at a very rough guess) about 600 entries updated by me, and about 90 by Peter."

Pardon? *The Bookseller* names Pat Cadigan's *Fools* as winner of the "Arthur C. Clarke Award, given for the best crime novel..."

The Last Dangerous Fresco.

Broadcasting in deadly secrecy to the entire Internet, Harlan Ellison revealed a former romantic entanglement: "Christopher Priest is no more and no less [than] a jilted lover. I rejected him from *The Last Dangerous Visions* and he has never been able to get over it." Mr Priest, who remains under the impression that he withdrew (and rapidly resold) "An Infinite Summer" after four months of editorial silence, was more interested by the same bulletin's Renaissance Editor comparison. Again HE identifies himself with Michelangelo being nagged by a philistine Pope to finish the Sistine Chapel as a rush job. CP helpfully comments: "The Sistine Chapel frescoes took Michelangelo just over four years to complete. He was 33 when he started in 1508 and 37 when he finished in 1512. When Ellison first announced *TLDV*'s impending publication, he too was 37. Now he is older than Pope Julius II (60 when elected), who not only commissioned Michelangelo's work but lived to see it completed."

Old Money. After years of heroic accountancy, I. Clark, Liquidator of Newsfield Ltd (remember their magazines *Fear* and *GMI*?), has scraped together some £200,000 of assets, awarded himself a meagre £30,000 fee, and paid off creditors at 8.87p in the pound. I am having my generous £17.72 cheque framed...

SF Masterclass. "They were within two hundred meters, rocketing toward nullgrav steel doors that could absorb a direct hit from a meson without buckling." (Margaret Weis & Don Perrin, *The Knights of the Black Earth*, 1995) "Still wearing his helmet, his mouth hung open in a way that changed Daniel's expression immediately." "Skaara felt his stomach nearly fall out of his mouth." "He had been staring at Skaara's large drawing for several minutes when it fell out of his mouth." (Selected from scores of similar great moments in the novelization *StarGate™* by Dean Devlin & Roland "The Mouth" Emmerich.)

The Giant Vorviades

Darrell Schweitzer

He found the giant crouching amid the frozen peaks of the highest mountains in the world. At that precise moment, he could remember little of his adventures coming here, of the hardships endured, and, perhaps, beloved comrades lost along the way. Even his own name seemed to shimmer just beyond his grasp.

But the voice out of his dreams told him clearly, as he led his emaciated horse onto the ledge, that what he saw across the adjacent chasm, huddled beneath the roof of the sky, was no mere pile of stones and ice. Here was Vorviades, cousin to the Shadow Titans and nemesis of the gods, devourer of light, enemy of mankind.

He made the sign of the dead for himself, crossing his arms briefly on his chest, tossing his head back to silently invoke the Righteous Nine Gods, performing, as best he could under the circumstances, his own funeral rites.

For his dreams told him that he had come to kill Vorviades, and he did not expect to survive the attempt.

Slowly the blizzard abated. The snowy curtain parted, and he beheld Vorviades, grown encrusted with centuries of waiting.

An avalanche roared into the gorge below. The monster turned its head toward him and opened its eyes. The giant's face looked like a thing of ice and stone, now torn free from the flesh of the mountains.

Calmly, the nameless man took his bags down from his pitiable horse, spread them out on the snow, and began to unpack, carefully unwrapping each piece of armour and strapping it on. Last came the ornately-inlaid silver sword and gleaming sun-shield of the Knights Inquisitor, and his helmet, which was shaped like the face of an eagle.

Without hesitation, trembling only from weariness and the cold, he armed and bedecked himself as a champion of the Righteous Gods. He closed his visor, snapping the eagle's mouth shut. The clang echoed upward, toward Vorviades.

At the very last he removed his horse's saddle and

bridle, and sent the beast down into the world wearing only a blanket.

Had the animal speech, he knew, it would be able to tell much, but the ending of the story would remain unknown, unless revealed by the Nine Gods in visions to the most holy.

For a confusing instant, he wasn't sure he even was a knight. He had some memory of another life, of a boatman who left his work by a river's bank when a dream summoned him; of crows picking at an armoured corpse by a roadside, shrieking the words of dream; of the voice in his dream commanding him to take up another man's life, and another: the boatman, a slain knight, other wanderers. Souls processed into the darkness, but each time the hero rose again and continued his centuried quest.

Perhaps it really had been that way and he was an impostor, a madman, last of a series of madmen, who had stolen armour off a corpse. He didn't know. It hardly mattered now.

He drew his sword.

The snow in the air swirled away, revealing blue sky. The sun gleamed on silver blade, golden shield, and on the icy face of Vorviades.

"Do you not fear me, little man?" The giant spoke with the voice of wind howling among skybound crags.

His waking dream told the knight not to fear, and he did not.

Vorviades slid down into the chasm in an even greater avalanche, the whole mountain seeming to split apart as his thundering limbs stretched themselves for the first time in countless years. Snow, ice, and powdered stone filled the air like spray, concealing the giant entirely.

When the knight saw Vorviades once more, the monster had donned a mask of battered, mottled silver. It rose out of the tumultuous snow-clouds like an ominous moon.

"Do you not fear me?"

For an instant the man was afraid, for he felt the voice within him quaver, as if the unseen and unknown

sender of the dreams actually feared Vorviades.

Then the fear was gone, like sound cut off by a door suddenly shut.

The silver mask hovered before him, rising out of the abyss. He struck at it with his sword. Sparks flew. The mountains echoed the sound, and with the giant's laughter. Vorviades stood up to his full height, swelling like smoke, filling the entire sky, blotting out the sun.

"Do you not fear me?"

"No," the man gasped, unprompted by any dream. "I do not." Indeed, it was entirely too late for fear.

The giant crouched down again, but the sky remained dark. Somehow hours had fled away. Stars gleamed. The knight could barely make out the rough, hunched shape of Vorviades, diminished considerably but still huge, climbing up out of the chasm onto the ledge. Chivalry bade him wait until the giant was on the ledge before him.

Vorviades loomed perhaps 40 feet above him.

"You have reason to fear me," he said. "Fear me when the cities are crushed beneath my tread. Fear me when the plains tremble, when the seas rise up and wash over the lands because I am wading."

"Not if you die here, on this ledge," said the knight.

"Not then, I freely admit."

The knight struck the giant again, but was brushed aside with the flourish of an enormous hand. He sprawled in the snow, perilously close to the rim of the ledge, rolling over on his back, his shield upraised to protect himself. He paused as he saw that the giant had diminished once more, and now was no more than 15 feet tall.

"I have seen your death in my dreams, Vorviades. Many times. It must be true."

"Aye, true. But is it true *now*?" The giant rushed at him. The knight leapt to his feet and struck again. He felt the blow connect, but found himself hurled through the air. Once more he rolled, at the edge of the abyss.

When he beheld Vorviades again, the giant was no more than ten feet tall, and seemed to be bleeding.

"I think it is true now."

"I myself have awakened *into* the dreams of many men," said Vorviades, "to bring them terror. I don't think it is over yet."

They fought on, the giant's fists crashing into the knight's shield, the silver sword flickering like a serpent's tongue, finding blood until the snow was splattered with it.

Now Vorviades was only a head taller than the knight, broad of girth and shoulder, but human-sized.

"I think it is over," said the knight.

"For you it is."

The giant had disappeared. The knight turned this way and that in the darkness, but could not find him. Then came the piercing, crushing pain from below and behind and he was hurled through the air once more, clear of the ledge this time, into the gorge below. His mind couldn't sort it out: the mountains and sky whirling, the clanging, crashing impact, pain spreading like the blood spurting inside his armour.

In one dream he seemed to imagine the giant shrunken down to the size of a dwarf, calmly snatching a dagger from the knight's belt and ramming up into his groin before shoving him off a cliff.

He lay broken on the rocks far below the ledge. No, he could not accept such an ending. The dream had to be torn and rewoven.

He dreamed of Vorviades, grown huge once more, his mottled mask like the rising silver moon, reaching down tenderly, lifting up the dying knight, peeling away armour and flesh with surprisingly delicate fingers.

The knight wept, but for joy, for this was a hero's proper death.

Vorviades wept too, but only for an instant. Then he spoke as if he were addressing to someone else entirely, the dead man in his hand already forgotten.

"Dream of me, and fear me. I am coming for you, no matter how many such you send against me."

Vorviades sighed, and blew the knight's soul away as one might puff on a dandelion; and the man who still could not remember his own name sailed off into the darkness, to be judged and to dwell far to the south among the crocodiles, in the belly of Surat-Kemad, the Dreaming God, Lord of Death, whose mouth is the night sky, whose teeth are the numberless stars.

The Dream-Sender, dreaming, sat up with a shout, but did not wake. His voice echoed in the stillness of his tomb, and his dreams were filled with fear. He felt the earth tremble as Vorviades strode down from the mountains and began to cross the plains.

Therefore the Dream-Sender searched his dreams once more, frantically, to find another champion.

After King Angharad the Great had conquered all the lands between the northern forests and the Crescent Sea, fathered many sons, and brought peace to his wide domains, he was still a vigorous man, and it was assumed that he would reign for years to come.

But one night in his banqueting hall, before all his warriors and the ladies of his court, the king slowly poured out his winecup in libation to the gods and said, "I am summoned to conquer Vorviades, for I fear him."

At once, all were filled with consternation, that King Angharad could be afraid.

His queen, seated beside him, said, "Surely this was only some idle fancy of sleep, and you need not heed it."

But the king said, "I have dreamed truly."

That very evening, messengers came with the news that a city in a distant province had been overthrown.

"It was an earthquake," they said.

"It was Vorviades. The earth trembles when he walks."

Who knew of Vorviades? The historians searched the name out of books, but such books were old and filled with obscurities. The poets knew of him, but only stories. Hadrondius the philosopher, chief of the royal counsellors and reputedly a wise man, merely said,

"Lord King, you must defeat whatever it is you fear."

Therefore the king summoned his armies, and in the days that followed the earth indeed trembled, with the tread of King Angharad and 10,000 soldiers, off to battle Vorviades. They covered the hills like dark locusts. They looked down on the broken columns of the fallen city, and the king said, "Indeed, this is the work of Vorviades."

No one dared say otherwise.

The king summoned Vorviades with the blasts of a thousand trumpets. But the giant did not come.

The moon rose over the ruins, and the king declared the moon to be a silver mask, dented and tarnished, with burning eyes. He commanded his archers to shoot, and no one could say that they shot only at the moon.

In the midst of a forest, the king peered into the shadows between the great trees, and cried, "There! There is Vorviades!"

He sent his lancers charging for hours, until many were lost in the forest. Yet no one reported that they were chasing only shadows.

When a fire burned a whole district, Angharad said, "Vorviades has breathed."

When crops withered, he said, "Vorviades was hungry." Not even Hadrondius could make the king see otherwise.

Only when the army attacked a river with their swords and the soldiers began joking about baths and rust did anyone mutter anything, or look to the king and shake their heads sadly.

In time, though, everyone concluded that King Angharad the Great was mad. His courtiers slipped away, and his soldiers went over to his too-numerous sons, who fought over the pieces of his kingdom. Angharad watched the final battle from a hilltop, weeping, a ragged beggar now, alone and forgotten by the contending armies. In the end, two of his sons were beheaded. Two more died on one another's swords. The old queen perished before his eyes when her chariot overturned as she escaped one faction and was about to be captured by another.

The king raged on his hilltop, shaking his fists at the sky, while the smoke of battle rose. In the evening, in the bloody sunset amid the dust, he saw the giant Vorviades, clearly outlined against the sky.

"You!" he shouted with the last of his strength. "Why did you never fight me?"

The giant turned his masked face, which now gleamed like a second sun. He spread his hands.

"I have fought you all this time, and behold, I am victorious. Have I not destroyed everything you arrayed against me?"

"You never fought against me!" the king shouted. He reached for his sword, then fell to his knees sobbing when he found that he had no sword.

"Yes I did," said Vorviades, hurling his spear, which was the thunderbolt, to transfix the king.

The Dream-Sender cried out in agony as if he himself had been pierced, but still he did not wake. His tomb resounded like a great, echoing bell. Once more he whispered into the minds of men, com-

manding that Vorviades be opposed. But, in his own dream, he saw his champions like wooden statues, fierce enough, impressive enough in the darkness; but when the moon rose — and the moon was the mask of Vorviades — they were revealed to be only carven wood, useless as Vorviades knocked them down one by one and drew ever nearer.

Dreaming, the Dream-Sender cried out in his dream —

In a parched land, to the south and east, the boy Anzaxos lay down to sleep in an olive grove on a mountainside overlooking the crescent sea. On that bright, quiet day, when the air was still, the birds fell silent, and the sea gleamed like a warrior's shield, Anzaxos dreamed of Vorviades standing astride the mountains, reaching up to seize the sun in his hands.

Vorviades seemed to notice the boy as he lay there. He turned toward him, and his hands poured out blood and fire, until Anzaxos drifted in crimson depths, remembering lives which were not his own: a knight who died by the side of the road; another, pierced from below on an icy ledge; a king who went mad and saw his sons perish.

He feared the giant then, but some other voice spoke to him of glory, and of the path of the hero.

Anzaxos awoke and ran to his village to tell his parents, scattering sheep.

When he had told his story, his mother took him in her arms, rocking him side to side, saying only, "Small boys have big dreams sometimes, but they are only dreams."

He asked his father, "What are dreams?"

"Vapours in the head. You're better off ignoring them."

But Anzaxos could not ignore his dream, or forget it, and he spoke of it often, boasting that he would be a hero one day and kill Vorviades. At first people laughed or turned away, but when a traveller knelt before him and said, "You who dream true dreams, prophesy for me," he began to do so, repeating things the giant had told him in his dreams.

His mother cried out in fright. His father commanded him to be silent, but it was too late. The high priest's servants seized him and carried him off to the temple, and, while he sat trembling and afraid in a dark vault beneath the temple, his mother wept, his father pleaded, and a great deal of money changed hands.

Then the high priest announced that a little boy had been telling lies, no oracle had been discovered, and the gods had not spoken.

But before he was allowed to go home, Anzaxos fell asleep in the dark vault and dreamed that Vorviades leaned over him and whispered through his silver mask, "If not you, another shall come after you to fight me." Then the giant departed, laughing.

Anzaxos's father took him out to a shed behind their house and beat him with a rod until he swore that he was only telling stories and would tell no more. Then his family had to leave, because their farm had been sold. They begged by the roadside for a time, until a

rich man hired them to work his land as tenants.

The boy grew up alone and silent, toiling in the rich man's fields, never telling stories, nor pausing to hear when others repeated old legends of the battles of Vorviades or the madness of King Angharad. His father and mother both died, exhausted and sorrowful, but never angry, as if somehow they knew that it wasn't their son's fault, that he had dreamed truly of Vorviades and now all their misfortunes were the giant's revenge. The giant wanted to fight, so the stories went. Combat was his only pleasure, the object of his lust, and when he was denied it, he grew very angry indeed.

When Anzaxos finally married Dera, the third daughter of a poor family, and begat three sons of his own, he did not tell his boys any of those stories, nor did he mention his dream of Vorviades. He raised them to work the fields, hoping that between the efforts of the four of them, they might one day get out of debt and buy their own farm back from their master.

But Velatin, the eldest, preferred to run. He ran along the dusty roads and over the hills without ever tiring or suffering thirst. When his father demanded of him why he ran rather than worked, he called back, "I am chasing Vorviades."

Anzaxos fell to his knees and beat his fists in the dust, remembering what the giant had said, that it would be either he or one who came after who would go off to fight.

And in those days there was war in all the lands. Velatin, the Swift, ran in the service of his king, bearing spear and shield and wearing a crested helmet, as messenger, as soldier, sometimes finding time to write home to his father that he spied Vorviades beyond the horizon, in the sunset or the moon's rising, and ran to meet him.

Dera said sadly, "Vorviades has claimed our first-born."

Tired, grey, Anzaxos could only shake his head and remember his dreams.

Still the wars continued. Velatin, boldest of all the youths of his country, saw the giant Vorviades above the enemy hosts, or looming in the smoke above a burning city, and raced to battle him.

Then, one night the silver moon-mask of Vorviades appeared to Anzaxos, hovering beyond the bedroom window as he sat up in bed, and his wife slept beside him.

"Velatin is impaled on a post. Crows peck out his eyes," the giant said.

"This is just vapour in the head," Anzaxos said. "Go away."

The giant went, but Anzaxos wept until dawn.

His second son, Kalo, likewise left for the wars. He worked a huge device called a scorpion, which hurled a flaming spear.

"I'll use it to shoot Vorviades," he said. "I'll avenge my brother's death."

Anzaxos only wept more, and when word came that Kalo, too, had perished, he could not weep any longer, and accepted the news in silence.

His wife sickened. His third son, Naius, tended her

lovingly, but one day he too came to his father and told how he had dreamed of Vorviades, and understood that he must be the champion of mankind against this monster. Naius was 12 years old. In those hard years, he had gone hungry a great deal, and was small and thin. From an accident in the fields, one of his legs was crooked. In his piping voice, holding back tears, he said, "I have to go, Papa."

At last Anzaxos was truly angry. His shame and his hatred of Vorviades overcame any fear. Trembling, afraid he would strike out in his rage and injure his sole surviving son, he said merely, "No, I shall go in your place, as I should have gone long ago."

Then he put on the plumed helmet Velatin had once worn, and took up his spear and shield. Around his waist he strapped Kalo's sword. He bade farewell to Dera, who, in her delirium, did not know him and babbled of Vorviades.

"I dreamed truly," Anzaxos said to all he met as he took to the road. "The only lie was to deny that I had seen Vorviades. Look. The signs of his passage are all around us."

Old as he was, tired as he was, he ran, as Velatin had, not as far, not as fast, but he crossed old battle-fields and saw the bones of the slain, noting the mark of Vorviades. He slept nights in ruined cities, listening to the giant's laughter on the wind. When he reached the shore of the sea, the sun was setting into the water, and there, amid the red and orange clouds, far over the sea, stood Vorviades, surveying all he had wrought.

Anzaxos caught the fading sunlight flashing on his shield. He shook his spear over his head. Vorviades gazed upon him.

"You!" Anzaxos shouted. "If you do not fight me, men will say you are afraid."

When the giant replied, storm clouds darkened the sky. The raging sea crashed upon the shore.

"At the Tarasian Gates, then, I shall meet with you in mortal combat, in one day's time."

Anzaxos was outraged. He was being mocked. "Coward! Your legs might be long enough, but you know I can't run that far in a single day. You're trying to escape me!"

"When the sun rises one more time," said the giant.

Anzaxos began to run, bearing his shield and spear, his helmet's plumed crest waving in the storm winds; ever eastward he ran, with the sea on his right. The greatest miracle was not his strength, his tirelessness, or how fast he ran. The storm ended, and the night continued. The stars turned in their courses, once, twice, five times and more, and the sun did not rise. Still Anzaxos ran, his endurance beyond anything human, beyond exhaustion or pain, in a kind of dream where he dreamt that he lay in a dark vault, far beneath the earth. At times he was not sure which he was, the dreamer or the runner, or the dreamer dreaming he was running.

The Dream-Sender said to him, many times, "You are my last, my best hope. You must prevail."

Anzaxos gasped, "Tell me of Vorviades. What are his strengths? What are his weaknesses?"

"His strengths are numberless and indescribable.

He is the fury of mankind, which even the gods fear. His weaknesses, I have never been able to discover."

"That's not much help."

"I cannot help you. You must help *me*. My dread of Vorviades is unendurable, for I know that if you do not win he will find my hiding place and tear me out of it, and rend me to pieces in the light of the sun."

In darkness, what should have been ten days and nights passed, and by starlight Anzaxos came to that place where the Tarasian mountains part like gates swung wide, revealing the southern lands beyond. There he paused. He drank from a stream and waited.

In time he noticed that the stars were being blotted out, as if ink had been spilled over the sky, spreading relentlessly toward him. A dark shape rose up. Its silver mask gleamed so faintly he could barely make it out.

"Ah, Vorviades. I have waited all my life for you."

"Now let us finish this."

"Yes, now."

There was no combat. The giant reached down and snatched him up, as a child might a particularly curious and cumbersome beetle, then hurled him far out to sea.

The Dream-Sender screamed one last time, a wailing, despairing cry. The tomb resonated like a gong. Dust trickled down. Surely, he realized in sudden, hideous terror, Vorviades had heard and would be coming soon.

Yet he did not wake. He commanded the dream to continue, and reached out in it, cupping Anzaxos in his hands, forbidding him to die, summoning a great whale to bear him on its back.

Vorviades *did* find him, in the dream. The silver moon-mask rose out of the sea. The terrible, burning eyes opened. The storm wind spoke.

"Enough. Every time you try to repel me, you draw me ever closer. Surrender to me at last."

Now the Dream-Sender tried to end the dream. He dismissed the whale and summoned a storm to drown Anzaxos, lest Vorviades follow him and be led, inevitably, to the crypt of the Dream-Sender.

Now it was time to hide, to be silent, to become invisible, that not even the Shadow Titans, or Vorviades who was their cousin, could find him in the darkness.

But Vorviades breathed on the sea and calmed it, and blew again so that the wind carried Anzaxos all the way to the southern shore, where he was cast up in Riverland, near the City of the Delta.

Anzaxos awoke from a dream of his own death. He sat up, coughing, his throat fantastically parched, his limbs weary beyond imagining.

"There's some wine in the jug," someone said.

He blinked in the bright sunlight and groped for the wine. As he drank, he slowly took in his surroundings.

A tent-flap swayed gently in a sea breeze. Beyond it, he could make out swaying grasses and a sandy beach. The whole front of the tent was open to the sea, to let the cool breeze in.

The speaker, who had offered him the wine, was a child. A pang of remembrance came: his own sons, little Naius, who was paler, but not much smaller

than this boy. His host could have been no more than 14 or 15, with a soft, round face, large eyes, and unkempt hair. He wore what must have once been a plain white robe and sat cross-legged on the ground, writing in a book in his lap, every once in a while reaching for or replacing one of the pens and brushes he held between ink-splattered toes.

Before Anzaxos could question him, the boy turned his book around, displaying with obvious pride two pages of beautifully intricate calligraphy. It was an indecipherable script, all whirls and flourishes.

"Do you like my story? It is all about the giant, Vorviades."

Anzaxos tried to draw away from him, but was too weak.

"Don't be afraid of me," said the boy.

"I... I don't understand. All my life... Who *are* you?"

The boy placed a sheet of blotting paper over the page he had been working on, then closed the book. "To answer your last question first because it is the easiest, I am the sorcerer Sekenre. Whether I am the author of this story or merely one who records it, I am not at all certain. But I know that I shall profit from it, and find its meaning."

"But... it's not just a *story*! I have *lived*—"

"All that suffering, all that dying, did it happen because I wrote it down, or did I write it down because it happened; or is there a third explanation which only Vorviades can give us? This is a further mystery. I have pondered it for at least 50 years."

Cautiously, Anzaxos took another sip of the wine, then wiped his mouth with his hand.

"You're crazy, child. You can't be that old."

The boy began to pack his pens and brushes carefully in a case. As he worked, he spoke, and somehow seemed to change, not in physical appearance, but in manner, in voice, in presence, until Anzaxos had the impression that someone else, that a whole legion of others in turn, wore this boy's body like a garment, and now someone else entirely shared the tent with him. "Know that when one sorcerer murders another, the murderer *becomes* his victim, who lives on in the body of his murderer, but subject to him as a slave to his master – supposedly, though it doesn't always work out that way – and perhaps in the company of many more. Thus the power of the sorcerer grows. Sekenre, when he was truly young, started by murdering his own father."

The voice and manner changed again. "But his father wanted him to, and contrived it."

And another. "We are many."

Yet another. "The body does not age, but the culmination of our selves is very ancient indeed."

Anzaxos asked, "Do any of you... remember... or dream about Vorviades, or of some *other* who is his foe?"

Now the boy wrapped his book carefully in an oil-cloth and put it in a shoulder bag. He seemed himself again, as if nothing had happened and he did not remember what he had just said. He got to his feet and stepped out of the tent, leaning over backward to stretch. He turned around to look at Anzaxos.

"Yes, I have dreamed of both of them, but only

recently. I think I know how the story ends. Come."

Anzaxos tried to rise. "I'm so tired."

"You were always tireless before."

"Yes. And I think I can manage to be one last time."

Sekenre helped him to his feet.

The Dream-Sender came to them every time they slept, screaming in terror of the giant, warning that Vorviades was right behind them, pointing into every shadow, into the palm trees where moonlight flickered and exclaiming, "There! There is Vorviades! I beg you, go away and do not lead him to me!"

But Anzaxos and Sekenre journeyed ever southward, along the left bank of the Great River, to a place of pillars, where the tombs of ancient kings lay half buried in the sand. They camped there, seeking the final solution to the puzzle, the way into a maze which could be found only in dreams, despite the Dream-Sender's every effort to conceal it.

The Dream-Sender appeared to Anzaxos, walking across the moonlit river, ripples spreading from his path. He pointed a bony finger. His bird-faced mask gleamed. His iridescent blue robe wavered like water flowing over him.

"You! You are Vorviades! You've changed your form once again, but I know you!"

He raised his staff as if to strike, but at that moment Anzaxos awoke, and beheld only the river, the dawn sky, and herons wading by the shore.

Each night, as they slept, Anzaxos and Sekenre both dreamed of an ancient city of high, white, marble walls and golden rooftops, and of a time so near the beginning of the world that the gods themselves walked the streets of the place; for the world was new then, and the very gods had only just awakened from their birthing-places in the Great River's mud. The first of mankind lived there, and had the gods as their house guests. A certain sorcerer dwelt among them, but apart. When the gods stood up and saw their likenesses in shadow, and these shadows sprang to life to become the Shadow Titans, making the very gods afraid, it was with the shadows that the sorcerer conversed. He invited them into his secret chamber and conferred for long hours. From them he gained certain powers and many, many secrets. He was the first and greatest of his kind.

Each night Sekenre and Anzaxos dreamed too of corridors and doorways, of passages turning, of hidden stairs. Sometimes they found such things, and moved their camp accordingly. Sometimes they understood what they had seen to be only symbols.

This went on for 20 years, during which Anzaxos grew older. Sekenre did not. Anzaxos, dreaming at night, began to prophesy by day, and travellers from the river stopped to hear him. Sekenre served as his attendant, gathering the offerings the travellers left. When the spirit left Anzaxos, and he no longer prophesied, flocks of birds swarmed over the ruins every day at sundown, leaving fish and fruits and grain scattered about. Thus the two of them were sustained. Perhaps Vorviades sent the birds.

The sun and wind darkened and gnarled Anzaxos,

until, when he went to drink from the river, he beheld the reflection of what looked like animate driftwood with a wisp of white hair at one end. Sekenre merely darkened. The two of them were almost naked now, their clothing having fallen to tatters. Anzaxos saw that the boy's body, youthful as it was, was covered with intricate scars, like the elaborate calligraphy of a manuscript page, or the inlay on a warrior's sword. He understood that Sekenre was not young.

Sometimes, by day, he would dream – or remember; he wasn't sure which – another life, which was filled with glory and battles; and also of working fields and raising sons, who went away and died, first the eldest, then the second. He didn't know what happened to the third. He couldn't remember his wife's name. He was certain this was one more trick of Vorviades.

Sometimes he awoke cursing Vorviades.

Sometimes he seemed to be the Dream-Sender, peering fearfully into the world, certain that Vorviades was near.

Every day, Sekenre wrote in his book, and questioned Anzaxos about what he had dreamed.

Anzaxos felt that he was at sea again, drifting on the waves, carried along by the wind as if he were a feather, dissolving into nothingness. He forgot his anger. He felt only a fading regret and longed for release.

Then Sekenre found the way into the maze.

By torchlight, the two of them descended into the tombs. Sekenre touched a stone or spoke a word and some panel swung aside or a lion-headed god receded into the floor, and they climbed down further. Into the carven darkness they went, between huge pillars, through vast stone chambers, like insects crawling among the bones of a corpse.

In a low, narrow vault they found a sarcophagus; on its lid carven the image of a man with the face of a bird. Sekenre, for all his sorcery, wasn't very strong and needed Anzaxos to help him slide the lid off. The two of them grunted and heaved and the lid crashed to the floor.

The vault reverberated like a gong.

Within lay a man in an iridescent robe, wearing a bird mask, like the one depicted on the stone lid. Around his neck was a tarnished silver medallion of the moon.

"Behold the most ancient of sorcerers, Vorviades," said Sekenre.

"I don't understand."

"Nor do I, entirely. Come. Help me lift him up."

The two of them carried the stranger – sleeping or dead, cold to the touch, no heavier or lighter than a man should be – all the way back to the surface. All the while Anzaxos felt his mind overbrimming with terrors, with dreams hurled at him like the waves of a storm-tossed ocean. But the dreams were formless things and had no power over him. Instead he concentrated on memories of his past life, of his home, and tried to imagine what sort of man he might have become if he had never heard the name Vorviades. This left him angry, sad, and resigned all at once. He

merely did what Sekenre told him to.

By the river's edge, in the bright moonlight, they laid the stranger out on the sand. Sekenre removed the mask, his hands trembling with excitement, his whole body tense with expectation.

But then the sorcerer merely sat quietly while the ancient face revealed crumbled away into bones and dust.

"I think I understand," Anzaxos said.

"Do you?"

"You wanted to murder this sorcerer, so all his secrets would be yours."

Sekenre paused, as if deep in thought, then handed the mask to Anzaxos. "The bird is called Hennet-Na. It seeks immortality by flying ever eastward, into the sunrise. But it never catches up with it. Eventually it flies all the way around the world and is burnt to death in the sunset. But that takes a long time. The mask of Hennet-Na may delay death for centuries, even as sorcery does, but neither is truly eternal. In the very end, Vorviades knew he was dying as even sorcerers must. He had mastered dreams, truly mastered them, so that what he dreamed became real. He was almost a god when he was young. He could create worlds. The giant which shared his name was merely his own implacable death, given shape by his dread of it. Now that his dreaming has ceased, the giant is no more."

"When you took the mask off —"

"I did not murder him. He merely ended."

"And what of those who fought for him, against his own dream?"

"Merely implements, like brushes to write the story with."

"To be discarded when you're done with them?"

"Brought into existence for that sole purpose."

Anzaxos thought of his wife and his sons. So many wasted lives. He wept and laughed at the absurdity that a discarded, worn-out implement should be able to do either.

"Come and assist me one more time," said Sekenre.

Together they cut reeds to make a funeral boat. As they worked, it seemed to Anzaxos that a third person crouched with them, stirring impatiently in the shadows of the tombs. When they finished, and the bones of the dead sorcerer were placed in the boat, this additional presence was gone.

They waded out into the river, Sekenre shoulder-deep, until the boat caught the black current which flows upstream and they both felt the cold wind that blows out of the land of the dead. The boat drifted out of their grasp.

"I cannot accept this," Anzaxos said. "I am more than an old brush you throw away."

"What then?"

Anzaxos wept and raged. "I don't know! What life can I return to? I beg of you, please, help me."

Sekenre reached under the water and took the old man's hand. He squeezed hard. "I cannot help you. But you can help yourself."

"How?"

"You need Vorviades. Go after him. You'll beat him yet."

"But he is gone. You said so yourself —?"

"Believe in him again. Dream him back. Remember."

"I —"

"Find the dream. Look!" Sekenre pointed to the sky. "There! Do you see him?"

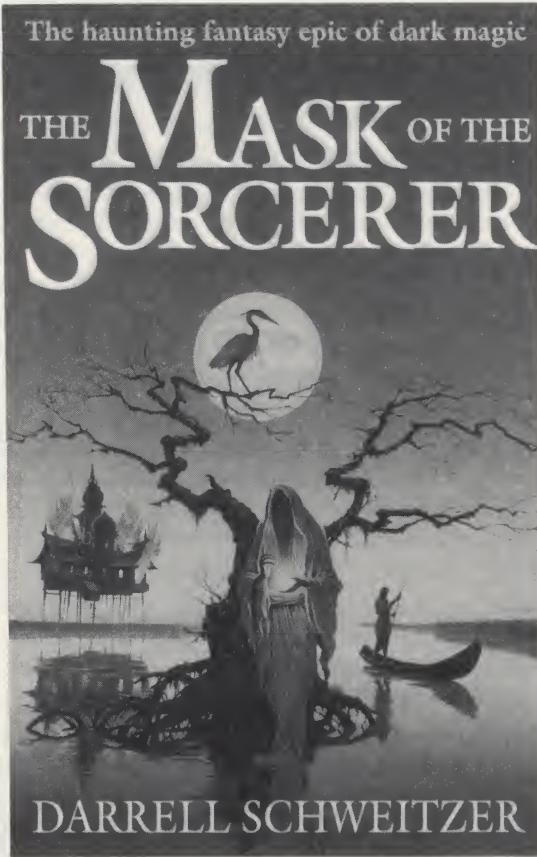
Anzaxos saw only the darkness, but he remembered knights and kings and a boy who had had a dream once, lied about it, and spent much of his life denying it until it would not be denied. Awake and yet dreaming, he was Velatin, who ran, and Kalos, who hurled spears with a device called a scorpion. He rose up and ran on the surface of the river as on smooth stone. He overtook the funeral boat, snatched the moon-medallion from among the piled bones, and put it on.

And he saw the giant Vorviades towering above the world, gazing down from behind the stars.

He shouted and he cursed and he ran, calling on the giant to come down and fight.

Later, Sekenre climbed up onto the shore, dried himself, and began writing in his book. He left several pages blank because he did not know how the story was going to end.

Darrell Schweitzer first appeared in *Interzone* with "On the Last Night of the Festival of the Dead" in issue 90. He is the author of many books, fiction and non-fiction, and is well known as the editor of *Worlds of Fantasy & Horror* (formerly *Weird Tales*). He lives in Pennsylvania, and his first novel in the UK, *The Mask of the Sorcerer*, is forthcoming in October 1995 from New English Library.





That morning they find a large heavy piece of flaccid white flesh floating on the calm waters: a 40-pound fragment torn from the edge of a giant squid's mantle. A moment later Thomas notices a second chunk of floating flesh, this time a thick two-foot length from somewhere near the tip of one of the squid's eight grasping tentacles. Both pieces are covered with puncture wounds from a sperm whale's teeth and the flesh is still so fresh that everybody on the 900-ton whale-catcher *New Dawn* is convinced that if the whale that had attacked and tried to eat the giant squid survived it must still be nearby.

Thomas knows that sperm whales, like wolves, are pack animals. And though the whale that attacked the squid could have been part of a pod, a small group of immature or older males, he is somehow certain that it is part of a true school, a family group of some 20 to 50 whales: immature males and females, 40-foot cows – some pregnant, others nursing calves – and the bull himself, 50 to 80 feet long and weighing up to 120 tons.

Thomas and Kathy, his seven-months-pregnant wife, are very excited: there are so few sperm whales

left they'd been afraid they'd find none this trip or that GreenEarth or the UN Whaling Commission's police forces would stop them from closing with any they did find.

The cook, an Italian named Antonio, tries to cook the length of tentacle chopped into slices in a garlic sauce but even paper-thin and marinated and cooked they prove too tough to be eaten, rubbery and tasteless and almost impossible to cut even with their sharpest steak knives despite the hours of preparation he's lavished on them.

But that's not important for Thomas and Kathy. What's important is finding the school and killing them, and not just these few sperm whales but every and any sperm whales they can find, until there are none left alive in the world.

Not because of the bonuses they get for every whale killed, nor out of any desire to do a good job for the Japanese company that is their ultimate employer despite the ship's Ukrainian registry.

For the sake of their unborn son.

Though Thomas had been going to marine zoos all his life to watch the dolphins and porpoises and

Full Fathom Deep

by Scott Baker



Illustrations by Russel Morgan

killer whales, though he'd read everything he could find on cetaceans and had even had a part-time job cleaning up at the Salt Lake City Dolphinarium by the time he was 12, it took three more years before his parents gave him permission to use the money he'd earned to go to California and stand with his Uncle John on a cliff near San Diego watching the grey whales migrating south to Baja California to mate and bear their young in its sheltered coves.

Uncle John worked for the GreenEarth Federation – an unstable alliance of a dozen or so conservation groups dedicated to preserving endangered species, though unable to agree on much of anything else. He'd been working for the cause as a lecturer, fundraiser and ship's captain for almost 20 years, since long before the original Greenpeace had merged with similar groups to form the Federation. Not so much because he wanted to change people or improve the world – though that, to be sure, had come late – but because he'd always been in love with the sea in general and with whales and dolphins in particular, and there'd been no other career that would have allowed him to maintain such close and loving contact with them.

He'd been the one who'd first taken Thomas to the Salt Lake City Dolphinarium and arranged with the killer whale's trainer to let the boy feed the whale fish out of his hand after the show and even pat it once, fearfully, on the snout. He was the one Thomas had always looked to to counter-balance his parents' stultifying Mormon respectability, their insistence on righteous rectitude and economic security.

Thomas was 17 and had written letters and circulated petitions for Greenpeace while getting his basic seaman's papers and finishing his sophomore year at the University of California at Santa Cruz, where he was studying Marine Ecology, before he was able to persuade his uncle, who at that time was the captain of the Greenpeace ship *l'Ohani Kai IV*, a converted submarine-chaser, to let him join the ship's crew over the summer.

He worked hard, did his job well, made some friends, and the next year he was back, not only on the *Ohani Kai* itself but in the zodiacs, the little inflatable outboard motor-driven boats the crew members used to position themselves as human shields between the whaling ships and their victims. That was in 1995, off Antarctica, where the Russian,

Ukrainian and Japanese whaling fleets were indiscriminately killing off what might have been the last of the blue, sei and finbacked whales despite the total protection theoretically granted all three species by the impotent International Whaling Commission, to whose conventions the Japanese, though not the ex-Soviet nations, supposedly adhered.

It was incredibly difficult, dangerous, terrifying – though the terror only hit him afterwards, when he was out of the zodiac and back on the *Ohani Kai* again – but what it gave him was worth all that and more: the certain knowledge of who and what he was, proof that he was someone willing to risk his own life to save the lives of other, defenceless creatures, and not just a younger version of his penny-pinching, intolerant parents or another smug brutal fool like his other uncle, Teddy, Vietnam interrogation expert and “war hero” now an aging veteran of the LAPD who was proud of his ability to get confessions out of people with no intention of confessing anything.

But a finback Thomas was trying to protect with his boat and body was killed that year despite everything he could do to save it. A Ukrainian harpooner (a gunner, really, since the harpoons used were no longer hurled into whales’ flanks by unprotected men risking their lives in tiny boats but were shot from specialized cannon on the decks of huge diesel-powered whale-catchers with so much force that the 200-pound harpoons with 500-gramme explosive charges in their heads had been known to go all the way through the whales they were aimed at to kill other whales behind them) ... a gunner, then, on one of the 900-ton whale-catchers accompanying the factory ship *Dalni Vostok* took advantage of a momentary opening between two Greenpeace zodiacs trying to protect the spouting whale and shot the finback from behind Thomas before it could replenish its oxygen supply and sound.

A dull boom from the harpoon gun, the explosive harpoon singing past him, the heavy line paying out from the coil in front of the gun, tethering the finback to the gunner as the harpoon buried itself in the whale’s side, then, three seconds after leaving the gun, the gigantic muffled sound as the its head exploded inside the whale’s great chest – jagged iron fragments ripping through the great beast’s heart, shredding its lungs even as the four long sharp metal barbs snapped open to pierce and clutch the whale’s remaining viscera – the whale plunging in pain, writhing, blood shooting ten, 20 yards into the air from its blow-holes like clotted crimson oil from twin gushers, covering Thomas with gore even as the whale gave a last great gasping sigh and with a final sweep of its powerful horizontal tail overturned his zodiac.

Luck was with him: the whale had died almost immediately, before it could crush him with its tail or tangle him in the harpoon’s line and drag him down with it as it sounded in a futile attempt to escape. His comrades fished him from the freezing water furious and frightened but before the exposure did him any real harm, though nothing they could do was able to stop the whale-catcher’s crew from taking the whale alongside their boat, injecting it with compressed air to keep it from sinking, then

guarding it until the *Dalni Vostok*’s tug arrived to tow the carcass back to the waiting factory ship, almost 60 nautical miles away.

But even forcing the whale-catcher to stay there guarding its kill had been a victory of sorts: without the *Ohani Kai* the catcher would have set a radio beacon on the floating carcass and left the body for the tug while it set off to hunt more whales. A whale-catcher had to kill at least two whales a day to cover the cost of its supply and operation, so that by immobilizing the boat until the tug came they were not only cutting down on the number of whales it could kill but were rendering the whaling company’s whole operation that much less economically viable.

As always, photos of the illegal kill were taken to be sent to the International Whaling Commission, documenting yet another Greenpeace protest about the illegal and unauthorized slaughter of supposedly protected species. The IWC would, of course, ignore the complaint and make no effort whatsoever to take even token action against the guilty parties, but Greenpeace hoped that someday the sheer number of complaints that had not been acted upon could be used to force the Commission to reform.

Thomas had felt nothing unexpected when that first whale died so close to him, nothing but the tension and fear, the need to concentrate and the sustaining anger that always flooded him when he thought about the way the whaling companies were practising genocide against a race, several races, of beings with brains up to six times the size of human brains, beings he was convinced were not only as intelligent as men but far nobler.

It was all tied up for him with the oil refineries near his parents’ house, the industrial wastes from Chicago and Detroit and the steel companies in Indiana that had almost completed killing off all the life in the Great Lakes, with a dog he had once seen hit by a truck and the way nobody had even tried to help his grandfather when the old man had a stroke one day when he was walking Thomas home from nursery school.

Kathy had been in one of the other zodiacs, a thin, not very pretty, intense brown-haired girl two years older than Thomas, but though he knew her slightly and talked to her as much as he talked to any of the other crew members he wasn’t especially close to her and had as yet no special feeling for her, nor she for him.

The ship they are on today, the *New Dawn*, is one of eleven similar whale-catchers accompanying the 40-year-old, 20,000-ton factory ship *Balaena*. All 12 ships are registered out of various Ukrainian and Russian cities and owned by a Ukrainian company which is in turn owned by a Japanese corporation, Yoshi Fisheries. The captain, most of the technicians and perhaps half the rest of the *Balaena*’s crew are Japanese; the refrigerator ship that arrives regularly to be loaded with whale meat and products is Japanese, but since Japan is a signatory to the new United Nations Whaling Commission’s conventions and the Ukraine is not, it is much easier for Yoshi Fisheries to operate

through their Ukrainian subsidiary.

Thomas, like Kathy, is a gunner, but there are more gunners than there are whale-catchers, so all the gunners have to spend four days a week on board the *Balaena*, helping with the work there. This is how it was for Thomas yesterday on the *Balaena*:

They have to wait a long time for the first successful whale-catcher to return with a prize, towing the whale itself and so wasting precious time and fuel oil that could have been better spent in the pursuit of other whales. The *Balaena* was designed to be operated with 18 whale-catchers and two tugs back in the days when it was relatively easy to find enough whales; Thomas is sure that there is no way the present reduced operation can be self-supporting, much less profitable, and waiting for the boats to return he is again reminded of his conviction that it can only be some perverse sense of national pride or corporate honour that makes Yoshi Fisheries and other Japanese corporations continue whaling operations which by all economic logic they should have abandoned long ago.

The Russians and Ukrainians, of course, always need food desperately and quite literally have oil to burn, but their ships are even older and very poorly maintained, while the wages they pay would be derisory even if they didn't systematically favour any and all of their own nationals over foreigners, no matter how qualified. Thomas would only consider signing onto one of their ships if the Japanese halted operations entirely.

The first whale of the day is a humpback, perhaps 30 feet long and 25 tons, its upper body black while its throat and chest and long, graceful flippers are white. It has a number of small bumps on its head but does not have a humped back; the name comes from the whales' habit of showing the napes of their necks and their backs as they dive.

The humpback's tail flukes have already been hacked off to make it easier for the catcher to tow its body; the carcass is still leaking a certain amount of blood, staining the sun-lit sea bright red where the catcher's crew has attached the whale to the factory ship's stern.

Thomas is disappointed. He bears the humpbacks and other baleen whales no special hatred and still retains a certain abstract admiration for their awesome underwater grace, for the pure beauty of the songs they sing to one another; though he lost all his over-romanticized love of cetaceans many years ago he still worries occasionally that the baleen whales may be intelligent, harmless beings deserving to be pitied and spared, and that by contributing to their eventual extinction he may be helping to commit irreparable harm. But such doubts come to him less and less often now, and when they do they sadden him for a while without in any way altering his determination to continue with what he is doing, what he knows has to be done.

And in any case, he tells himself, the pollution in the oceans will probably kill off all the whales in the end. He is only helping accelerate a process he is powerless to halt. Yet he hates the four days he spends on the flensing platform aboard the *Balaena*, hates the



work he does there in a way only partially connected with its difficult, dangerous and unpleasant nature.

One of the Japanese lowers an enormous toothed steel claw – the grab – and clamps it onto the stump where the whale's tail had been, then reverses the diesel winch and with a great rattle and whir and jerkily hauls the whale tail-first up the rear ramp onto the platform where Thomas and the other flensers are waiting for it.

The noise of the protesting winch ceases and for a moment there is relative silence, only the hiss of escaping steam, the roar of the diesel jets that feed the boilers, the sound of his fellow workers' voices, with underneath it all the steady throb of the *Balaena*'s engines as the factory ship keeps itself facing into the wind.

And permeating everything the stale, rancid, greasy smell of years and years of blood and blubber.

Thomas grips the long-handled, razor-sharp flensing knife carefully in his gloved hands – it looks a little like a hockey stick – and climbs up onto the broad slippery back, making sure that with every step he takes that he gets a good grip in the whale's flesh with the long spikes on his boots, carefully avoiding the slowly writhing clusters of pale fleshy barnacles known as dead man's fingers that are still clinging to the dead whale's skin. Whale lice, small scuttling crustaceans, are everywhere and the whale's hide is covered with the circular and semicircular scars left by lampreys and other parasites, the human-head sized hemispherical holes where the sharks following the whale-catcher have gouged their strangely symmetrical mouthfuls from the carcass.

Thomas and one of the other flensers, Philippe – like him a former member of Greenpeace though not for all that a friend – begin slashing the blubber around the head free while the rest of the flensing crew make deep slits from head to tail, cutting the blubber into thick longitudinal strips. Finishing with the head, Thomas begins cutting holes in the forward ends of the blubber strips, helps introduce the heavy hooks at the ends of their steel cables into the holes he's made.

The flensers climb down off the carcass and the winch operators yank, ripping the blubber strips from the whale's body like peeling the skin from a banana, with a noise like ten million sheets of greasy paper being ripped in half at the same time. The exposed flesh is a red so dark it's almost black, due to the myoglobin in the muscle tissues – a haemoglobin-like substance that allows whales to store much of the oxygen they need for long dives in the muscles themselves – but the blood covering the deck is as bright and red as any other blood.

More straining of the winches and the whale is turned over so the process can be repeated on the other side. The body is slick with blood, the footing more dangerous than ever; steel boxes and cables are swinging rapidly by overhead; other workers are cutting up the blubber strips, tossing them through the hatch in the deck that leads to the rotary grinders where the blubber is shredded before continuing on to the boilers, there to render up the oils

that are becoming more and more valuable as petroleum gets scarcer.

While the blubber on the whale's belly, which yields a higher-quality oil than its back and sides, is being sectioned and stripped, then prepared for a separate set of boilers, the lower jaw and whalebone plaques – the baleen – with which the humpback had strained the krill it ate are ripped free, dragged to the edge of the ship and thrown overboard. The gulls, waiting for the intestines and other offal, dive to investigate, then resume their circling, crying.

None of the other whale-catchers has yet returned, so Thomas and Philippe have nothing to do for the moment but stand around talking with each other and the rest of the flensing crew, all of them covered with blood and grease. The grab is disengaged from the humpback's caudal stump, readied for the next whale and the flayed carcass – the scrot – is winched forward along the groove running down the factory ship's centre to the next deck, where the head is separated from the body and the meat removed from it before the skull is pushed toward the power-bonesaws. Meanwhile other whale butchers are cutting three-to-four-ton masses of muscle tissue from along the spine with their hand knives. The ribs are detached from the carcass and the two halves of the thoracic cage hauled aloft so the butchers can strip the meat from them and isolate the ribs two-by-two for sawing. Nothing then remains to be done but to saw up the spinal column: the whale's spongy bones are rich in oil, which is cooked out of them in much the same way as it is cooked from the blubber and even, sometimes, from the meat. The meat and the viscera to be saved are already being stored in refrigerated chambers or put into pressure cookers, while the intestines, stomach, and some of the other internal organs are thrown overboard to the gulls and sharks.

Thomas can hear the saws and rotary grinders, smell the sharp raw vapours from the meat and entrails, the odour of hot oil mingling with the rich fatty aroma of the cooking whale meat, the sea-stink of the half-ton of krill spilled from the humpback's stomach onto the forward deck in the final stages of the butchering and which is even now being shoved overboard. The whole operation has taken only about half an hour, and Thomas has been ready for the next whale for perhaps half that time, though it will in fact be another two hours before a second boat returns with a whale to be flensed and butchered.

After the second whale the flensing crew takes a break, washes as much of the grease and blood off themselves as they can. They sit down to a meal of *onomi*, raw meat cut from the rich fatty tissues on the dorsal side of the whale's body, closest to the flukes. It's a great delicacy for the Japanese members of the crew, at least early in the voyage, and contains a higher percentage of usable proteins than beef while harbouring no parasites dangerous to man, but the flavour is something Thomas has had to train himself to tolerate, though he forces himself to eat *onomi* and the even less appetizing *akinuku* – red meat – and *sunoko* – throat meat – whenever possible, as a matter of principle.

The special feeling that he and Kathy share, the love they feel for each other, was born in 1996, the third year Thomas sailed with a Greenpeace expedition. Thomas had just finished his senior year in marine biology, taking his exams early, at the beginning of April, so he could join the crew; Kathy was working for her doctorate in Cetology at the University of Miami and the time she spent at sea with Greenpeace was counted as fieldwork. They were two of the only four Americans on the former minesweeper *Le Nouveau Guerrier de l'Arc en Cie* bought with money raised by the combined efforts of Greenpeace France and the Belgian *Les Amis de la Mer* to replace the original *Rainbow Warrior*, sunk long ago by the French secret services in New Zealand in an effort to keep it from interfering with French nuclear testing. The *Nouveau Guerrier*'s mission was to hinder the Japanese whaling fleet in the Indian Ocean, since at the time the Soviets had halted whaling and the Russians and Ukrainians had not yet begun again.

Thomas had spoken no French whatsoever before he began preparing for the voyage but Kathy had a typical graduate student's minimal competence in a foreign language that luckily happened to be French: though everyone else on board spoke at least a little English Thomas and Kathy got into the habit of working together, not only because they could communicate more easily than with the others, but also because Kathy could translate things in French that weren't addressed directly to Thomas but that he needed to know.

Which was how they happened to be together in an over-sized zodiac, Thomas steering and Kathy filming, in the midst of a school of about 40 sperm whales being slaughtered by the 13 whale-catchers accompanying the Japanese factory ship *Sonai Maru*. The *Sonai Maru*, with its tugs and whale-catchers, had formed a circle around the school, trapping the whales inside the ring with beamed ultrasound that not only terrified and confused them but also rendered their sonar useless, thus – since sperm whales use echo-location where a land animal would use its eyes – effectively blinding them and making it impossible for them to escape by diving deep to surface later miles away.

The whales were rushing around blindly, leaping free of the water only to come crashing down again, sometimes smashing themselves against the sides of the 700-ton whale-catchers and the 500-ton tugs without doing any damage while the harpoon-gunners picked them off, slaughtering the nursing calves first so as to ensure their mothers and the other cows would remain by their sides trying to keep them from sinking and drowning while the gunners killed the young whales, cows, bulls and remaining calves indiscriminately. The water was sticky crimson, littered with floating corpses; gulls, sharks and other scavengers were already tearing at the bodies, the loose hunks of flesh and entrails, while outside the circle of ultrasound a pack of black and white killer whales had gathered, waiting their chance at the dead and dying sperm whales, the few surviving motherless calves. There was no time for the gunners to try for

quick or clean kills, there were too many whales to be killed for them to shoot second harpoons into wounded whales that were taking too long to die – and some of the harpooned whales were still alive, still trying vainly to sound and escape despite their blindness, despite the almost unbreakable cables attached to the gigantic metal barbs that had sprung open in their guts when the harpoons exploded, puncturing already damaged hearts and lungs and stomachs and livers and intestines, that kept the whales chained to the catchers like fish flopping on stringers.

It took some of the whales an hour and a half to die after the harpoons that had exploded off-centre within them had begun the slow, agonizing process of killing them.

A single blow from the massive tail flukes, even a glancing collision with any of the huge lopsided heads, would have exploded the zodiac like a burst balloon and knocked Thomas and Kathy into the churning waves; there, if by some freak chance the impact didn't kill them, to drown, but despite the whales' frenzy Thomas had a feeling that they'd somehow sensed that the zodiac and its passengers were their friends, no part of the whaling fleet attacking them, and that the whales were doing what they could to spare the tiny boat, though even so it was only by using all the skill he had that Thomas was able to avoid the whales' maddened rushes, keep from being crushed when they leapt and fell back, or broken by other dying whales' final frenzies, only by luck that he was able to avoid being tangled in the myriads of lines chaining the harpooned whales to their killers' boats; and twice had had to pull the motor up and allow the zodiac to glide over the half-submerged back of a 40- or 50-foot monster trying to escape.

They were terrified, both of them, but neither had time to pay attention to their fear; there was no time for anything but staying alive, trying to get the pictures they were there for until the whales' frenzies got too violent for Kathy to continue filming and she put the camera back in its water-tight case, strapped it down and then concentrated on just holding tight to the bucking Zodiac.

And then, rising from some buried, forgotten level beneath their terror, from some depth freed by their total conscious concentration on doing what they had to do to survive, came a bizarre, totally unexpected sense of peace. Thomas saw, felt his whole body, Kathy, the zodiac, sea, whales, whale-catchers and *Nouveau Guerrier de l'Arc en Ciel*, everything, lose its substance, become transparent and ringing as the finest, purest, clearest crystal and then vanish altogether, leaving only the brightness welling up within himself, the clear shining that was Kathy, was the whales, the crews of the Japanese ships and the *Nouveau Guerrier de l'Arc en Ciel*, the shining that was somehow all of humanity and of which he was a part as he was a part of Kathy and she of him, lost in each other, the two of them somehow reaching through the blazing brightness, finding and undressing each other, making love together there for the first time in the rocking, half-swamped boat.

And after the last of the whales finally died, hours

later, and the light had begun to fade away, sinking back into the inner depths from which it had so briefly been freed, their minds met and mingled and merged as completely and unreservedly as their bodies and innermost souls already had, and when even that was finally over and they found themselves trapped once again in their separate selves, yet some part of the light that they had shared was still there for each of them, uniting them as neither had ever imagined he or she could ever be united with anyone or anything, leaving them with a shared joy, a numinous peace, beyond all expectation and understanding.

It is late afternoon and Thomas and Kathy are ready behind their harpoon guns. The fingers of Thomas's right hand are coiled lightly around the massive trigger mechanism, his left hand is poised ready to swing the gun into firing position at an instant's notice, when the radio operator calls him on the intercom to tell him that one of the other whale-catchers has located a school of sperm whales about 35 nautical miles from the *New Dawn*'s present position and that the *Balaena*'s captain has ordered all the whale-catchers to move into position to encircle the school and attack it simultaneously.

Thomas gives the orders to change direction – as senior gunner he is in command of the whale-catcher's movements – and leans over to pat Kathy on her swollen belly, kisses her. He can sense the baby within her, feel the warm trusting brightness of its still-unformed, still-plastic mind even now, despite the deadening influence of the nearby sperm whales, and he hopes that soon he and Kathy will have a chance to share their lives and love not only with each other but with their baby, their unborn son, achieve for the first time a total communion with him as soon as the whales in the school have been killed.

He had discussed it with her afterward, back on the *Nouveau Guerrier*, but only with her: the captain and most of the other crew members had experienced none of what the two of them had felt when the whale died, understood nothing of what had driven them to make love there in the open zodiac, covered with clotting gore and in plain sight of the Japanese sailors; and those that seemed to have felt something, shared in some way what had happened to them, avoided them, refused to meet their eyes or answer their carefully ambiguous questions and turned from them in a sort of unadmitted terror, as if afraid they'd been tainted by some contagious corruption.

All except the bosun, a Belgian named Robert Louit, who had taken them aside and talked confusedly about God and Catholicism and the Kingdom of Heaven, telling them that the sperm whales were God's Angels on Earth, mortal as Jesus had been mortal but granting to all those who believed in them and helped them against the ungodly a taste of the paradise awaiting mankind when the heathen had been cast down to Hell and God's Kingdom was come again.

And when, months later, Thomas tried to discuss what had happened with his Uncle John, his uncle had reacted with a secular version of the same

explanation: yes, he, too, had felt that strange communion and oneness with all humanity when a large school of sperm whales was wiped out, but he was convinced it was the dying whales' final attempt to get through to humanity, defenders and attackers alike, to show them who and what they were destroying, the paradisiacal communion that the whales shared among themselves and would gladly share with mankind if only humanity would accept its true role as part of the living earth and give up its pretentious claim to be nature's master.

But though much of what he said was what he'd always said, what Thomas himself had always believed, his voice was the voice of the Belgian bosun telling Thomas that sperm whales were God's Angels, was the voice of a saucer fanatic he'd had once seen on a talk show explaining how the Bible had been written by a race of noble extraterrestrials from a planet circling Sirius and how, properly deciphered, it gave full and complete instructions for the construction of a manna-powered flying saucer capable of transporting all humanity to their heavenly realm – the voice, finally, of Thomas's parents telling him their own smug, satisfied version of the one revealed truth.

Because both Thomas and Kathy knew it wasn't like that when sperm whales died. That time in the zodiac together had been only the first time they'd experienced the crystalline brilliance of that union with each other and all creation when the last sperm whale in a school died. And what they'd experienced was not, could not have been some final selfless gift, some supreme reward granted them out of the whales' more than human generosity: somewhere in the brilliance they could always feel a cold clutching greed, the dying whales' unwillingness to relinquish the light that they, Thomas and Kathy, were experiencing, and then later, just as that oneness and communion were being taken from them again, they always felt again that same hungering selfishness that had nothing in it of angelic concern, nobility or generosity.

Neither Thomas nor Kathy had any training in physics but at first they had tried to explain the way the whales' deaths opened them to each other telepathically in terms of radio communication and electronics: either the whales produced some sort of static that drowned out humanity's emissions or perhaps there were only a certain number of bandwidths or channels available, like possible phone connections, and once all the lines were engaged there was no way anyone else could make a call. But that didn't explain the greed, the *need* that both of them had felt just before the barriers had closed in around them again.

All they finally came up with was a few analogies, a way of looking at things rather than any attempt at scientific explanation. Just as the earth was a single biosphere in which all living things and their inter-relations contributed to the whole, so there was a psychic biosphere in which all living things had their proper place. But the sperm whales had usurped it, like those tall trees that take all the light for themselves, leaving the forest floor in thick green gloom, so that only after a forest fire has killed off the adult trees can their potential rivals find the

light they need to survive and grow to maturity. Or perhaps telepathy depended on some sort of limited psychic resource, like oxygen, that the sperm whales were hoarding for themselves, rendering the psychic biosphere incapable of sustaining humanity's rightful telepathic wholeness, leaving men locked in ignorant isolation from each other, fearing and hating each other when by rights they should have been able to live in peace. And it was only now, with the world's population of adult sperm whales reduced to a few thousand at most, that the death of even a few whales could open the telepathic biosphere to humanity until the other sperm whales managed to steal it back again in whatever way they had of taking and monopolizing it for their own use.

Which implied that if the remaining sperm whales could be killed, mankind could at last regain the use of those innate mental facilities that the whales were preventing them from using, could at last live as men had been meant to live, in harmony not only with themselves but with the world around them.

And though they knew it was only a rough analogy, that the true explanation must be far more complex and subtle, perhaps beyond anything mankind could comprehend before regaining its stolen heritage, it still seemed to explain not only what they'd experienced themselves but the changes beginning in the wider world around them. And indeed, over the next few years they both noticed what seemed to be unmistakable signs of a gradual gentling of human nature, a slow increase in the concern and empathy men felt not only towards one another but towards the greater biosphere of which they, too, were a part.

Ironically, this meant that there was less new pollution in the seas to prevent the few young whales born from reaching maturity, and more international efforts to clean up the pollution already there. There were newer and stricter conservation and environmental protection laws of all sorts, with the laws concerning whales and whaling enforced by a new International Whaling Commission that was in fact a U.N. agency.

But even so the Japanese whaling industry refused to change its mode of operations, rejecting the premiums the U.N. offered for reconversion to fishing and sea-farming, while the ex-Soviet states were still too famished to reject any potential food source. And when Thomas and Kathy finally applied for work as gunners on the *Balaena*'s whale-catchers they had no need to conceal their former experience with Greenpeace; the men hiring them seemed to understand not only what they wanted to do but at least some of why they wanted to do it, and they were given to understand that the time they'd spent at sea with Greenpeace was considered an asset, rather than a liability.

The school, the radio operator has informed them, is supposed to be huge, as many as 150 to 200 sperm whales, which, if true, would make it the largest surviving school in the world.

Thomas smiles stiffly, nervous and excited at the same time, opens and closes his right hand a number of times to keep it from cramping, stretches his arms high over his head. He makes sure the sonar's



been turned off; the *New Dawn* will find its way to the whales by radio and radar, avoiding all chance of spooking the school.

The fact that with luck they'll be able to approach the school and close with it despite the whales' domination of the psychic biosphere – the fact that despite their mental powers the whales only take alarm if the whalers give themselves away acoustically or visually – has long since proved to Thomas that sperm whales are, in fact, just another kind of unreasoning animal, their enormous brains serving only to link them to each other like members of some ocean-going ant hill or termite mound.

Long before they catch sight of the whales themselves they discover the reason for the beasts' presence here, off the Pacific coast of South America: a gigantic rip formed by the confluence of two warm currents against which floating jetsam has drifted and is being held. The rip goes on for miles and miles, a golden yellow road like a long strip of submerged wheat field leading straight to the whales, no more than 20 yards wide at its broadest. Within that narrow band the plankton is incredibly concentrated – thicker, Thomas thinks, falling back on a familiar image, than pea soup – and thousands upon thousands of fish and birds and squid have gathered to feed on the plankton and one another. The masses of small rainbow-coloured squid darting around beneath the surface feeding on the fish or anything else small enough to be eaten, often propelling themselves clear up out of the water by the powerful jet action of their siphons, must have been an irresistible temptation to the sperm whales.

And, as Thomas had expected, when at last they do sight the whales the great beasts are concentrated along the narrow strip, wallowing in it as they gorge themselves on the fish and small squids, on the larger squids and sharks that have come to prey in turn on the original predators.

But the school is huge, far larger than the radio operator had said. Thomas would guess there are at least 300, perhaps half again more: the greatest gathering of sperm whales he has ever heard of. There seem to be very few calves or truly young whales, just endless vistas of 50-to-80-foot-long ugly grey-backed beasts, their heads and bodies asymmetric and hideous, all of them sounding and surfacing, gorging themselves, rolling over, spouting at an angle from the single blow-holes on the left sides of their massive, misshapen heads.

For an instant he sees them as gigantic blue-black leeches, monstrous cold slimy hundred-ton parasites squirming and undulating there on the surface of the waves, waiting only their chance to attach themselves to him and Kathy and their unborn child, but then he shakes his head, regains control of his imagination.

The radio operator calls again, tells him that the other whale-catchers are already in formation. They can turn on the ultrasound and start the killing if he's ready. Thomas looks at Kathy. She nods and he tells the radio operator to go ahead. He aims his harpoon cannon, kills his first whale, his second, third, fourth. A few yards away Kathy is doing the same thing, her movements a little slower than his but

more precise. The whales are plunging in terror, trying to force themselves past the ultrasound barrier, through the ever-tightening circle that forces them closer and closer, blinded and panic-stricken, ramming each other in their frenzied attempts to escape, as Thomas and the other gunners kill whale after whale, calves, cows, bulls: it doesn't make any difference what they are, they're all sperm whales, animals stealing the harmony that he and Kathy have tasted together, that he wants for his unborn child and that his fanatical Mormon parents never had a chance at and now they're dead, killed last year in an auto accident in Nevada when they were just beginning to learn how to relax, at long last beginning to feel comfortable with who and what they were –

He's somehow killed more than a dozen whales already. The water all around the boat is stained bright crimson, filled with floating bodies, injured whales making that strange, not-quite-screaming noise they make when they're in pain, when they're dying; his whole body aches and rising up through his killing frenzy is that bizarre, never-expected sense of peace as his body, the *New Dawn*, the ocean and whales and other whale-catchers all lose their substance, turn to ringing crystal, leaving only the brightness welling up in him and in Kathy and in the crews of the other ships, in the men and women he begins to sense all over the world now that the thick miasma of the whale's psychic exhalation is beginning to clear, now that the walls that have kept men locked away from each other for so many years of fear and war and hatred are going down, being destroyed once and for all as these, the last sperm whales, are finally destroyed. And they are the last, there are no more sperm whales anywhere in the world: the knowledge is suddenly there, inescapable and unquestioned, inherent in the new freedom he feels, the way in which the final barriers are evaporating like smoke or a bad dream.

And then at last, all the whales dead and dying, he can take his cramped and aching hands from his harpoon gun, lie down on the deck and let his body rest while with his spirit he reaches out for Kathy, finds her and touches her and melts into her, the two of them reaching together into the virgin soul of their unborn son to share with him their love and joy.

Only to find rising through the stillness of his inner soul just as even now it is rising toward them from the lightless waters 2,000 metres beneath their feet, the many-tentacled shape of the only other enemy the sperm whale ever had, Leviathan the dark serpent, the twisting serpent, the dragon that is in the sea.

The eyes like huge luminous beach balls, the great black parrot-like beak, the eight suckered grasping tentacles and the two longer palps, the suckers at their tips lined with rings of rasping teeth. Free at last.

Scott Baker is new to *Interzone* but by no means new to sf and fantasy: his stories have appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies, and his novels include *Nightchild* (1979), *Firedance* (1986) and *Webs* (1989). An American by birth and upbringing, he has lived in France for many years.

BECKETT, SAM Time-slipping scientist played by Scott Bakula in the American television series *Quantum Leap* (1989-93), created by Donald P. Bellisario. Dr Beckett is a physicist whose arcane experimentation has allowed him to move around in the time-continuum represented by his own life-span. The catch is that when he materializes at a new date he always does so in the body of another person. His companion in these adventures is the sardonic Al Calavicci (Dean Stockwell), who appears as a hologram invisible to all except Sam. Puzzling stuff, but it succeeded in making sufficient sense to its many keen viewers (the one the thing insufficiently explained, to the best of my knowledge, is just why this fictional hero bears the name of an eminent Nobel Prize-winning Irish playwright and novelist). Timeslip Sam has also appeared in a series of spinoff novels by Ashley McConnell and others.

COOPER, DALE Boyish FBI agent, with a famous taste for "damn' fine" coffee and cherry pie, who investigates the murder of teenager Laura Palmer amid truly bizarre goings-on in a small north-western town. He was played by Kyle MacLachlan in the American television crime-fantasy serial/series/soap opera (some critics called it a "feuilleton"), *Twin Peaks* (1990-91). This cult show's creators were director David Lynch and scriptwriter Mark Frost. Spinoff books included *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer* by Jennifer Lynch (1990), and a feature-film "prequel" was *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992; dir. Lynch).

DEATH Skull-faced, dark-robed, scythe-carrying "anthropomorphic personification" of Mortality (and well aware that he is such) who always speaks hollowly in BLOCK LETTERS. Despite the nature of his profession, he has a soft side – and a liking for curry. Perhaps appropriately, he is the nearest thing to a continuous character in Terry Pratchett's hugely popular sequence of humorous fantasy novels known as the "Discworld" series: *The Colour of Magic* (1983), *The Light Fantastic* (1986), *Equal Rites* (1987), *Mort* (1987), *Sourcery* (1988), *Wyrd Sisters* (1988), *Pyramids* (1989), *Guards! Guards!* (1989), *Eric* (1990; novella), *Moving Pictures* (1990), *Reaper Man* (1991) *Witches Abroad* (1991), *Small Gods* (1992), *Lords and Ladies* (1992), *Men at Arms* (1993), *Soul Music* (1994), *Interesting Times* (1994) and *Maskerade* (1995). Other recurring characters, such as the incompetent wizard Rincewind or the iron-willed witch Granny Weatherwax, pop in and out of the books, but Death is the only one who is present in them all. As their titles indicate, *Mort* and *Reaper Man* are among those in which

Imaginary PEOPLE

Some sample entries from the new edition.

David Pringle

I have been working on a new edition of my book *Imaginary People* (1987), subtitled "A Who's Who of Modern Fictional Characters." All being well, the second edition should appear from Scolar Press within the next year. The criteria for inclusion are not in the main "literary"; characters are included if they have lived beyond their source or have become household names for one reason or another. Most of the entrants do not derive from the science fiction, fantasy or horror fields, but many do. The following dozen are among the newly written, 1995 entries which are sf, fantasy or horror-connected. I'd be grateful for comments and corrections.

he takes centre stage. Although he now seems very much Terry Pratchett's creation, one could solemnly describe Death's origins as "traditional" (but it's possible he was inspired by the skeletal figure who appears in Ingmar Bergman's film *The Seventh Seal* [1957].) The Discworld books have yet to be filmed (Pratchett has an anecdote about an American producer who wanted to make a deal for *Mort* and said, "first we'll have to get rid of this Death angle") but a number of them have been read or dramatized on BBC radio, released as talking books or adapted as graphic novels. The cult will grow and grow.

KRUEGER, FREDDY Monstrous serial killer, a sort of poor man's Hannibal LECTER, in the film *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984; dir. Wes Craven) and its numbered sequels (1985, 1987, 1988, 1989), concluding with *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare* (1991; dir. Rachel Talalay). Played by Robert Englund throughout the series, Freddy has a ghastly scarred face and wears a metallic hand with knives for nails. His creator was writer-director Wes Craven. Although repeatedly overcome by his intended teenage victims, the supernaturally indestructible Freddy popped up again and again in the television series *Freddy's Nightmares* (1988-90), as well as in novelizations and spin-off books. Similar splatter-horror villains of the

1980s include Michael Myers, in the movie *Halloween* (1978; dir. John Carpenter) and its follow-ups; and Jason, in *Friday the Thirteenth* (1980; dir. Sean S. Cunningham) *et seq*: these shudder-provoking killers enjoyed a great vogue among the young, but Freddy Krueger was king of them all.

LECTER, HANNIBAL "Hannibal the Cannibal," a genius-level serial killer who made his first appearances in Thomas Harris's novels *Red Dragon* (1981) and *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988). A former psychiatrist, Lecter is securely imprisoned by the time of these novels (although he escapes in the second), and from his cell he assists in the detection and pursuit of other murderers whose strange mentality only he can understand to the full. With his razor-sharp mind and flesh-eating proclivities, and above all because of the psychological enigma of his perversely evil nature, Lecter has emerged as the leading horror figure of the late 20th century – a DRACULA for our times. Although an American, he has been portrayed in films by two distinguished British actors: Brian Cox played him in *Manhunter* (1986; dir. Michael Mann; based on *Red Dragon*), and Anthony Hopkins embodied him even more chillingly in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991; dir. Jonathan Demme). Undoubtedly Lecter will be back; the world awaits with foreboding.

LESTAT French-born, Louisiana-based immortal vampire in Anne Rice's bestselling novel *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) and its sequels in her "Vampire Chronicles" series: *The Vampire Lestat* (1985), *The Queen of the Damned* (1988), *The Tale of the Body Thief* (1992) and *Memnoch the Devil* (1995). Although he is the villain of the first of these, Lestat moves very much to the fore in the second volume (his autobiography) and remains a principal character in the later books, becoming a rock star, a time-traveller, and a defier of the Devil himself. In the film *Interview with the Vampire* (1994; dir. Neil Jordan) he was played by Tom Cruise.

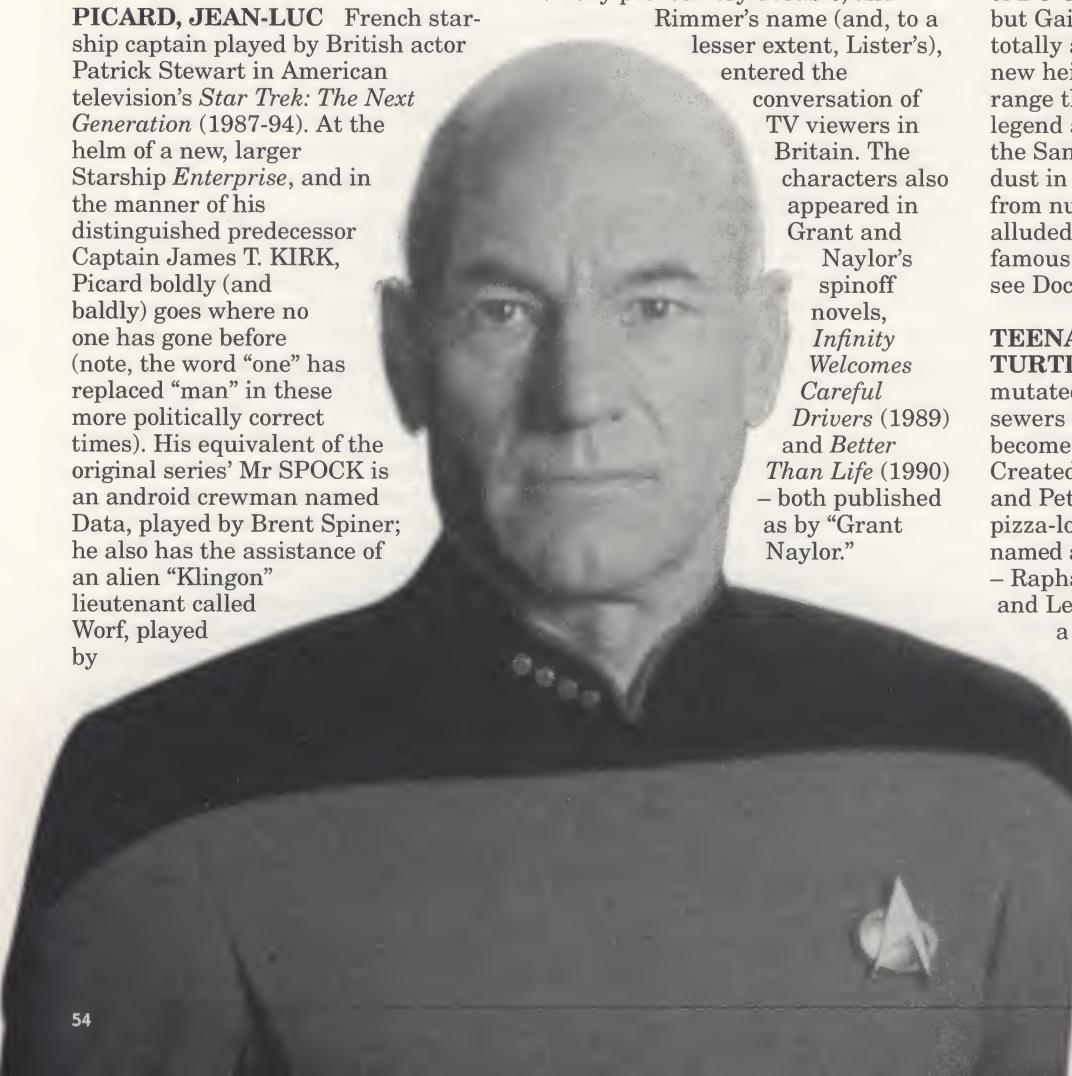
MULDER & SCULLY Fox Mulder and Dana Scully, special investigators of the far-out and the paranormal in the American television series *The X-Files* (from 1993). David Duchovny played Mulder (the credulous one), Gillian Anderson played Scully (the sceptical one), and the series was created by writer-producer Chris Carter. Playing on the public's love of paranoid conspiracy theories surrounding unidentified flying objects and the like, the show swiftly became a cult success. A series of spinoff novels featuring Mulder and Scully began with *The X-Files: Goblins* by Charles Grant (1994).

PICARD, JEAN-LUC French starship captain played by British actor Patrick Stewart in American television's *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-94). At the helm of a new, larger Starship *Enterprise*, and in the manner of his distinguished predecessor Captain James T. KIRK, Picard boldly (and baldly) goes where no one has gone before (note, the word "one" has replaced "man" in these more politically correct times). His equivalent of the original series' Mr SPOCK is an android crewman named Data, played by Brent Spiner; he also has the assistance of an alien "Klingon" lieutenant called Worf, played by

Michael Dorn. As a follow-up series, *The Next Generation* proved very successful, with a substantially longer TV life than its forebear. Initiated by the late Gene Roddenberry, it was produced in the main by newer talents Rick Berman, Michael Piller and Jeri Taylor. Patrick Stewart's Picard reached the big screen in the movie *Star Trek: Generations* (1994; dir. David Carson), where, thanks to some time-twisting shenanigans, he meets the venerable Captain Kirk (still played by William Shatner). In addition to various novelizations of scripts, a spinoff series of original novels about the adventures of Picard and crew, written by authors such as Michael Jan Friedman and Carmen Carter, had reached nearly 40 volumes by mid-1995.

RIMMER, ARNOLD J. Hologram of a dead astronaut played by Chris Barrie in the BBC television sitcom *Red Dwarf* (from 1988), written by Rob Grant and Doug Naylor. After disaster strikes their spacecraft, Rimmer provides company of an irritating sort for the last living crew-member, the slobbish Dave Lister (played by Craig Charles). Other companions include an android, an evolved cat, a sentient computer and, from time to time, various extraterrestrial visitors. This science-fiction comedy proved very durable, and

Rimmer's name (and, to a lesser extent, Lister's), entered the conversation of TV viewers in Britain. The characters also appeared in Grant and Naylor's spinoff novels, *Infinity Welcomes Careful Drivers* (1989) and *Better Than Life* (1990) – both published as by "Grant Naylor."



RIPLEY, ELLEN Tough space-woman played by Sigourney Weaver in the films *Alien* (1979; dir. Ridley Scott; scripted by Dan O'Bannon), *Aliens* (1986; dir. James Cameron) and *Alien³* (1992; dir. David Fincher). A role-model for feminists the universe over, she battles the vilest of extraterrestrial menaces, a creature which secretes itself aboard a spacecraft (and similar enclosed environments, in the later films) and eventually kills all but one of the crew. Ripley is a splendid survivor – at least up until the last moments of the grim third movie. Novelizations of the screenplays were written by Alan Dean Foster, and there have also been spinoff series of "Aliens" comic books (as well as further paperback novelizations derived from these).

SANDMAN, THE The pale, supernatural Lord of Dreams in a long series of highly-praised comic books written by British author Neil Gaiman (from 1988) and collected in "graphic novel" form. Volume titles include *The Doll's House* (1990), *Preludes and Nocturnes* (1991), *Dream Country* (1991), *Season of Mists* (1992), *A Game of You* (1992), *Fables and Reflections* (1993) and *Brief Lives* (1994). The character had actually begun life many years earlier (circa 1940), as a very minor member of DC Comics' "stable" of superheroes, but Gaiman was to re-imagine him totally and take him to extraordinary new heights of fantasy in tales that range through the whole of history, legend and mythology. (The figure of the Sandman, who throws sand or dust in a sleepy person's eyes, comes from nursery folklore, and was alluded to by E. T. A. Hoffmann in his famous story "The Sandman" [1816] – see Doctor COPPELIUS.)

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES Comic-book turtles, mutated by effluents in the New York sewers where they dwell, and now become expert in the martial arts. Created in 1984 by Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird, the green-skinned, pizza-loving, streetwise foursome are named after Italian Renaissance artists – Raphael, Michelangelo, Donatello and Leonardo. Originally intended as a spoof, the Turtles swiftly became an enormous craze, inspiring an animated television series of the late 1980s and a run of live-action films: *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990; dir. Steve Barron), *The Secret of the Ooze* (1991; dir. Michael Pressman) and *The Turtles are Back...in Time* (1993; dir. Stuart Gillard).

Abnormal Psychologies

Chris Gilmore

The first two offerings this month both appealed to and annoyed me in much the same way. I happen to like dualistic symbolism, multiple plot-lines, frankly abnormal psychology and a highly charged sexual atmosphere. On the other hand, I dislike loose ends. This is a matter of temperament more than taste, so people of other inclinations may well wonder what the fuss is about.

I was vaguely aware of the Golem legend, through having read Willy Ley's summary, H. L. Gold's short story and Marge Piercy's over-praised novel, and I knew there was an early classic film about it, but I hadn't come across Gustav Meyrink's 1913 novel *The Golem*, now brought out by Dedalus at £6.99 in a new and quite superb translation by Mike Mitchell. It was very much an eye-opener, and I would think quite somewhat of a minority taste, but I found it compelling (and rather shocking) reading.

Many books have been praised for their dreamlike quality, but I've yet to meet one which captured so accurately that nagging unease which the dreamer experiences, as he tries to square the details of his waking life with the situation in which he finds himself, at once so strange and so familiar. The first three chapters in particular read like three dreams with no real connection between them, but the reader is warned that the second contains some of the most virulent anti-Semitism I've ever come across, made more shocking by the great power of Meyrink's imagery. The Jews of the Prague ghetto, typified by the junk-dealer Wassertrun and his teenage daughter Rosina, are represented as mentally abnormal, physically repulsive and sexually incontinent, while a little later Wassori, his son, is described as a the worst sort of medical charlatan. It's fair to say that the cabballistic magician Hillel and his daughter Miriam are people of a very different type – Ormazd to the Wassertruns' Ahriman – but first impressions are important. That as recently as 1913 such opinions were not merely tolerated but unremarkable, not only among proto-Blackshirts but in a man of such evident intellect, must give anyone pause – who can guess what currently held beliefs will seem as monstrous a lifetime hence? There are those who would doubtless have the book banned on that account; I reject censorship on such grounds, but I do

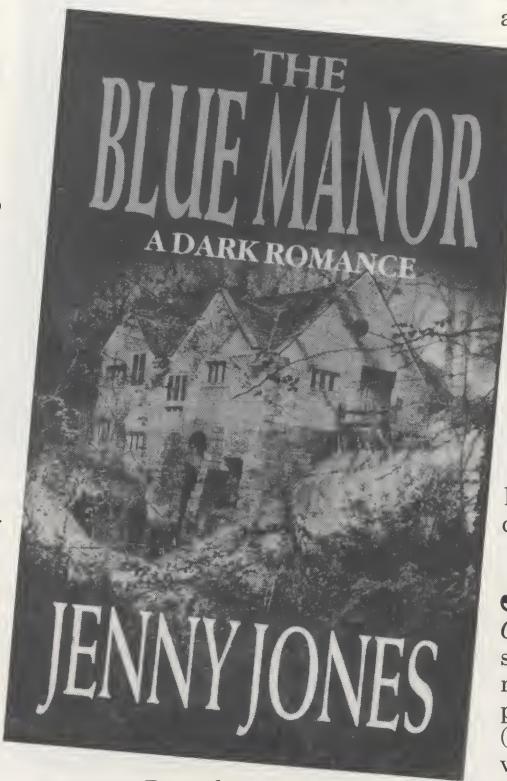
think it merits a health warning.

The story is narrated by Athanasius Pernath, an engraver of jewels, who lives alone in the ghetto. He gradually comes to realize that he has no idea how long he has been there, why he ever came there and what sort of life he lived previously. Not only is his past mysterious, there are gaps in his recent memory. A man brings him a jewelled book to repair, and he finds that he can recollect no detail of his appearance. At the same time, he feels that his identity is being usurped, possibly by the mysterious man with the book. The Golem legend is current in the ghetto, the more so as it is allegedly subject to a 33-year cycle, and

it is now time for it to

supernatural mystery and novel of obsession would be discordant, but Meyrink (or Mitchell) writes so brilliantly in all three modes that one just keeps turning the pages. Even the lengthy harangues which, in breach of all the usual rules, make up much of the dialogue, are full of vitality. As the book progresses it becomes apparent that, quite apart from the supernatural occurrences into which he is drawn, Pernath's mental state is beginning to unravel; he becomes subject to mood swings, and though he falls in love with Miriam (which is natural enough) he becomes no less fixated on Angelina and the depraved Rosina. These developments rather overwhelm the supernatural manifestations, which remain a static aspect of the background though they never quite drop out of sight.

And the ending? Here the book disappoints; an explanation of sorts is furnished, but it resolves none of the enigmas and ties off very few of the loose ends. My feeling is that the author found it impossible to resolve his various plot-lines satisfactorily, and tried to make a virtue of leaving them mysterious. Some would say that the book should therefore never have been published, and in other circumstances I'd be one of them. But this has been such an exhilarating ride that I'm more than happy to forgive a disappointing destination.



reappear. Pernath becomes convinced that he and the Golem are in some way linked, a belief that is rapidly vindicated, though the nature of the link remains obscure.

Meanwhile, Pernath is becoming ever more embroiled in a complex intrigue. A doctor has rented the apartment next to his as a trysting place with his married mistress, Angelina. Charousek, a deranged medical student, knows of this, and believes that Wassertrun, who owns the building is seeking to expose the couple. Can Pernath help? In other hands the combination of psychosexual thriller,

Jenny Jones's debut novel, the wide-ranging, three-volume *Flight Over Fire*, had strong characters and some good set-piece scenes but was most notable for its command of atmosphere. Its successor, *The Blue Manor* (Gollancz, £15.99), displays the same virtues but within a much narrower compass, producing a bravura display of claustrophobia. All the action takes place in or near the manor of the title, a run-down country house in Epping Forest, whither come Phizackerly Byrne, a man of middle years in search of a new life, and Tom Crabtree, accepted lover of Kate, the daughter of the house. It's a house full of long-suppressed, unhappy secrets, which seem on the brink of breaking into and through the lives of the current occupants, whose characters and attitudes are polar opposites. Ruth Banniere, the owner, is almost hysterically cool, rational and conventional; the

effort of exuding so much composure, goodwill and social grace is wearing her out. Simon, her cousin and lover, is an alcoholic on the leading edge of a nervous breakdown, a cantankerous physical wreck with a taste for self-pity and gnomic utterance. Ruth rationalizes away, Simon masochistically revels in, the supernatural manifestations (called "Dogfrog" and "Leafer") which spring, like Robert Graves's *lollocks*, from the abused body of the *genius loci* – or do they?

As the narrative switches between viewpoints (mainly those of Crabtree and Byrne) the book's unstated Yin-Yang symbolism becomes ever more insistent; it appears that much of what is going on is being set up and controlled by Peter Lightowler, an elderly bastard scion of the Bannieres (and Simon's father). He lives in the Red House in the nearby village of Theydon, and his lifelong ambition, to be realized soon or not at all, is to take possession of the Blue Manor. The Yin-Yang conflict continues at another level with the appearance of Alicia, Simon's mother and Peter's ex-wife, who is determined to thwart him.

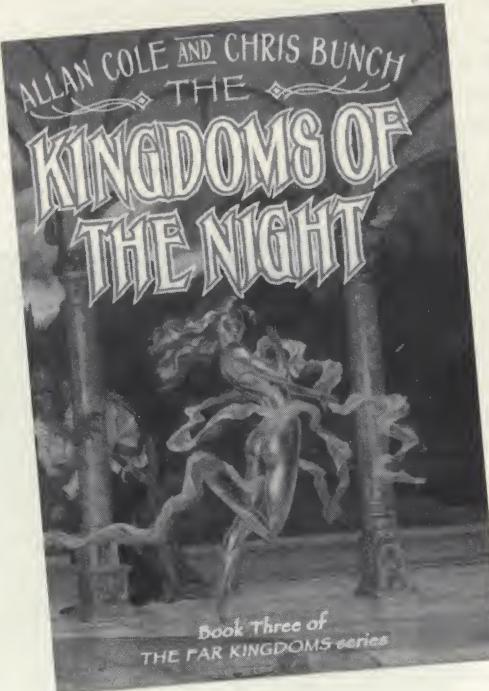
The energy of Jones's writing and the strength of her characters sustain the book's interest, but it must be said, it smells somewhat of the lamp; it's haunted by other books no less than by Dogfrog and Leafer. The framework is essentially that of John Fowles's *The Magus*, though it was central to that book that the manifestations were bogus; here some are surely real, though others are doubtful. Crabtree starts to write what he first regards as fiction but rapidly comes to see as a revelation of the family's murky past, which puts one in mind of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, where a writer "accidentally" produces an historically accurate account of the Crucifixion. As for Crabtree's narrative, it's a re-direction of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Well, the book's all about both bastardy and the objective correlative, so if it's the unacknowledged offspring of three cult novels, decorum could hardly be served better.

It's usual for books of this kind to proceed from one revelation to another, each more horrific and shameful than the last, but Jones's technique is slightly different: Peter and Alicia present their differing versions of the background to their quarrel, but neither is to be trusted; the essential mysteries remain mysterious to the gruesome end, greatly adding to the tension but leaving numerous loose ends. It's never disclosed why Byrne experiences *déjà vu* on first seeing the manor, let alone how the Lightowers came by their magical powers – like Deborah Grabien, or James Blish in certain moods, Jones makes her own rules, which the reader must divine

as he proceeds. It's worth the effort, this time, but I'd have preferred a tighter rationale.

Reviewing Allan Cole and Chris Bunch's *The Far Kingdoms* in *Interzone* 91, I described it as bog-standard but very well done. With certain reservations the same goes for the freestanding sequel, *Kingdoms of the Night* (Del Rey, \$23; due in the UK from Legend). It has the same virtues of pace, colour and vivacity, and the same defects of flat characterization, *ad hoc* plotting and occasional tin-eared dialogue.

All right, you don't ask too much of sword & sorcery. The framework is yet another quest, again figuring Amalric Antero, now grown old but game for one last throw of the dice; this final quest for the Kingdoms of



the title, aka the true Far Kingdoms (those of the previous book being rather crudely relegated to the second division) will win him immortality or death with honour – and as both are preferable to senility, he can't really lose. Moreover, he has for companion Janelia, sexy great granddaughter of his old friend/betrayer Janos Greycloak, and with all Janos's talents for witchcraft, in-fighting and intrigue. The spirit of the book is summed up well enough at the end of Chapter 6. "So, with fire, death, and treachery behind us, we set full sail into the unknown."

Gung-ho all the way, and why not? Incident follows upon incident, but as the companions have no real idea of where they're going or what they may find when they get there, there's little sense of progress. The writing gets slacker, with grammatical errors ("like" for "as", "I" for "me") and clichés creeping in. Nor does their relationship develop very notably. Amalric, who for no stated reason finds increasing prox-

imity to his goal literally rejuvenating, becomes physically attracted to Janelia, but it gives rise to little tension; he either will or will not be restrained by ideas of dignity and decency, and if not she either will or will not grant him a last fling. Such considerations have informed any number of novels of sensibility, but they're out of scale when the principals are pitched daily against demons, shape-changers, ghosts and cannibals.

There's really only room for one developed character in a first-person book of this kind, and though Amalric is interesting enough to carry it, Cole and Bunch seem to regard their readership as uninterested in psychology. They may be right, but they are surely wrong to pander to them in two undignified ways. The first lies in the gender-selection; Kele, an old seadog and commodore of Amalric's fleet, is defined as a woman. Why? To satisfy some PC mantra, I presume, as her womanhood makes no sociological sense and is used to no effect whatever. Nor do things improve when the party encounters a matriarchal tribe; the jokes represent no advance on E. R. Burroughs's *Carson of Venus* (1939).

The second is an assumption that the book will become in some way "more accessible to ordinary folk" if there are vernacular contractions ("would've", "that'd") in the narrative and some salt-of-the-earth characters who "speak their own language." The result (lumbered on poor Kele) goes like this:

"B'sides," I heard her chastise a griping sailor, "only a lummox wi' a boil fer a head an' pus fer brains w'd be arguin' wi' a bone caster."

If the plot requires it, I'll buy a character whose speech centres are impaired, who speaks a barely comprehensible dialect, or who happens to be dead drunk. Not for anything will I buy such mawkish, tin-eared self-indulgence. The result was that I found myself deconstructing the book as I went along, trying to work out just whom Cole and Bunch were hoping to impress, and why they regard such a good impression as worth marring what is otherwise a worthwhile juvenile. Whatever the reason, when the reader is tempted to treat a book in this way it's a sign of artistic failure, though it's fair to add that as (whatever the publishers say) this is a juvenile in the tradition of Rider Haggard, my reaction is not the most relevant. Try it on bright boys up to 14, but tell them it has a sociological subtext – the very brightest may spot it. If they still enthuse at 17, they ain't that bright.

When I slate a book it's usually for one or more of a fairly narrow range of reasons. The writer has no feeling for the language, his ideas are

bogus, banal or hateful, he insults the intelligence of his public, he uses affection to disguise paucity of thought, his jokes aren't funny and so forth. I'm unable to recommend Phil O'Brien's *Memories of the Irish Israeli War* (New Futurist Books, C-format paperback, £7.99) for the rather different reason that I don't think it should be a book at all.

It's written in what reads like a mixture of Scots and Irish sentence structure and vocabulary, but with mercifully little brogue, and the effect is very much like attending a performance artist in a smoky Kilburn bar well past your usual bedtime – exhilarating for 20 minutes or so, but rapidly becoming wearisome as the Guinness takes its toll. The setting is a Soho sandwich bar, where Mad Dog the narrator, an Irish girl down on her luck, is taken on as a waitress and gets to meet sundry Middle Eastern types who work there as well. Some of the jokes are rather good:

"This little ikon here doesn't travel on a passport, he travels on a missile's End User's Certificate. We're going to stick some extra guidance up his arse and he'll reach the Promised Land."

"Argentina," says Farid.

Ah would you look at the Russian, sure he was cute as fuck. His sky eyes closed over, blinked open again. "Is error in my paperwork. They can't read if I'm a Jew or a Jet."

"So they used a diplo-pimp to sell him to a country under sanctions. And you thought you were stupid, huh Zevie?"

Most are a lot less good, but the main trouble is lack of contrast. The whole book is written in a frenetic spate of consciousness which left me no time to savour its felicities but plenty to grouch over the jokes that went over my head, which were many. I don't know the seedier parts of the West End anything like well enough, and apart from the menu terms the Arabic mainly passed me by. So did much of Mad Dog's dialogue:

"Who says the green veined Revolutionary, with hair flowing from the brow on a bit of cardboard in the aluminium window frame of a corporation flat, shall die for a pack of wee turds?"

Who indeed, and does it matter? I like to understand the question before I chance an answer, and though I'm prepared to believe there's a meaning to be teased from these oblique references, to me green veins suggest cheese before anything else. If you're on intimate terms with the strange beings who haunt the pits beneath Centre Point and read *Finnegans Wake* for pleasure, this one may be for you. For me, life's too short and I can feel a headache coming on.

Chris Gilmore

Gene Tea

James Lovegrove

The possibilities that genetic engineering open up for mankind are as awesome as they are terrifying. The thought of tampering with the very stuff of which we are made should fill any sane human being with a deep sense of unease, and yet at the same time who would not welcome gene-therapy cures for cancer, heart

what was once the province of the men in white coats is now sold on the streets like crack-cocaine. In short, yet another mystery of science has become commonplace, just as the electricity that powers your home was once a mere spark in Faraday's laboratory.

Fairyland centres around Alex Sharkey, gene hacker and designer of exquisite viral drugs that tweak the double-helix and fuck the mind; an overweight mummy's boy with a Wildean sense of fashion and a well-developed sense of self-preservation. When a drug deal goes bad, Alex is forced to ally himself with Milena, a hyper-intelligent nine-year-old who needs his help to pull off an audacious scheme. She wants to take "dolls" – genetically-tailored baboons who do all the mindless, menial work, the Epsilons of this particular brave new world – and transform them into independently thinking creatures capable of reproducing and evolving.

Thanks to Alex's biotechnological know-how, she succeeds – in spades. Drawing on the mythologies of human culture, the newly invented subspecies refashion themselves as a superior race with talents and tastes that render them indistinguishable from fairies – not the fey, sprightly creatures that skip through Victorian literature and the Cottingley photographs but the full-on, grudge-toting, child-abducting, mighty morphin power strangers of *Tam Lin* and middle-European folklore. These guys have little regard or respect for humans. All they want is a place of their own where they can live and breed undisturbed – a fairyland – and woe betide whoever gets in the way of their ambition.

Unwittingly, or perhaps through the agencies of a higher power, Alex again and again finds himself on hand to experience the birth-pangs of successive fairy generations. Struggling to come to terms with the monsters he has created, he is at once Frankenstein



disease, AIDS?

Who would not want the ageing process retarded or a serious deformity corrected? And yet what if it turns out that prolonged youth is available only to the very wealthy? And who defines the criteria for physical perfection? What is physical perfection anyway? Looking like Cher? Like Pamela Anderson? Like, for crying out loud, Michael Jackson?

Fertile soil, and in *Fairyland* (Gollancz, £16.99 hc; £8.99 pb) Paul J. McAuley has harvested a barn-full. Here is a near future where genetic engineering has run amok, where altering your RNA with a twist of nanotechnology is as easy as altering your lager with a twist of lime, and where

and helpless onlooker, tragic hero and comic figure. During an unusually creepy battle in a darkened Albanian forest, as venom-spitting and stealth-cloaked fairies attack from the trees, he gladly leaves the fighting to his companions; his priorities are intellectual and more abstract. He is the classic passive protagonist, the done-to rather than the doer, a quality he shares with the central characters of other McAuley novels such as *Red Dust* and *Pasquale's Angel* – men caught up in circumstances beyond their control, simply trying to survive. But, though he would prefer to keep his distance, Alex has more in common with his creations than he might perhaps wish. Like the fairies, he is seeking a fairyland of his own, one engendered by his childhood memories of London and living with his mother, and like the fairies he shape-shifts – changing his identity, his name (for names have power), even his motives – in the name of self-preservation. Much of the “father” is reflected in his “children.”

Fairyland is a kaleidoscope of realities, some virtual, some drug-altered. Dozens of different characters flit through its pages, adding to the impressionistic vision of a planet in chaos. Even with Alex at its core (an unreliable linchpin at best), events in the novel seem to fragment as they unfold. The distinctions between the fairies’ self-perpetuating mythology and the harsh facts of a cyber-future become blurred. Nothing is certain. The reader is entering a fairyland of McAuley’s creation, and the rules are... there are no rules.

Make no mistake, *Fairyland*, despite its title, is hard sf – “hard” as in techno-buff, but also as in difficult. The ideas and the prose are densely woven. Skipping a single sentence can also mean missing a major plot point. But the rewards for the concentration the novel demands are memorable images, brain-inverting concepts and flashes of arid humour (for instance, a viral drug that gives you a complete UFO abduction experience complete with “fuzzy false memories of rape” is called the Strieber). If McAuley isn’t on your reading-list already, *Fairyland* is as good an introduction as any to the work of this frighteningly intelligent and intelligently frightening sf author.

Talking of frightening, there’s a new Shaun Hutson on the shelves. Is it that time of year already? Scary! The jacket of *Lucy’s Child* (Little, Brown, £15.99) promises that this novel represents “a brilliant development in Shaun Hutson’s writing,” but then you know, don’t you, that most authors write their own blurbs.

The story involves two sisters. One is a middle-class wife, half of a dual-income-no-kids set-up that, on the surface at any rate, seems to be

functioning smoothly. The other is a tearaway ne’er-do-well who may or may not have been responsible for their parents’ deaths in a house fire. The latter, Lucy, turns up on her older sister Beth’s clean-swept doorstep one day, begging asylum. She is in some kind of trouble. Reluctantly Beth consents to put Lucy up for a few days. The next thing you know, Lucy has seduced a neighbouring teenager, has tried to seduce Beth’s husband, and then suffers a terrible accident which leaves her on a life-support machine, technically dead. She is being kept alive for just one reason: she is four months pregnant.

And it is here, at the very point where the novel divides between Parts One and Two, that there is a moment when you think that Hutson really is about to break new ground (new for him, that is). To barren Beth, desperate to have a child of her own, a God-given opportunity has fallen into her lap. Some good may yet come of Lucy’s wasted life. But the doctors are not sure if they’re prepared to keep Lucy’s body going long enough for the baby to come to term and be delivered. This is potentially intriguing stuff. This strays onto the psychological territory mapped out by the likes of Brian Moore (the novelist, not the football commentator). This touches on real fears, emotions and moral dilemmas.

And then Hutson goes and blows it in Part Two with the usual nonsense: ghostly possession, revenge, gory killings. There’s one particularly effective bit of *urghh* involving a kitchen waste-disposal unit, but that’s about it.

The whole thing is couched in that amalgam of shorthand cliché and truncated metaphor that is the *lingua franca* of lowbrow fiction. Footsteps always “echo away into the distance,” and while one use of the phrase “for what seemed like an eternity” may, just may be forgivable, *Lucy’s Child* uses it no less than five times, and that is where use becomes abuse. Still, the sort of people who like this sort of thing will not mind that sort of thing, and Hutson himself seems immune to such literary niceties. This is a man who prefacing his sections with quotations from the lyrics of Metallica as well as from Proust and *Hamlet* (such a democracy of aesthetic sensibility!). This is a man, moreover, who po-facedly adorns the back of the book with a quotation snipped from a typically sarcastic *Private Eye* write-up. Hutson either has very large balls or a tragically foreshortened sense of irony.

The preparation and consumption of hot beverages plays a large part in this book, as it does in the works of many authors who cannot think of a more imaginative way to occupy their characters while they sit around in domestic settings and spout great chunks of expository dialogue at one

another. In *Lucy’s Child* the drinks of choice are tea and coffee. In *The Rise of Cromwell Jones* (Warner, £4.99) by Roy Clews, coffee’s off and only tea is available. But what quantities of tea! Cupfuls of the stuff are gulped down. Kettle after kettle is boiled. Gallons of freshly brewed PG Tips arrive in steaming pots and are poured out into waiting china, milked, sugared, imbibed, enjoyed. More tea is drunk in this novel than in all 11 volumes of *A Complete History of Tea-Drinking* (or would, if such a work existed). It’s enough to give the most hardened tannin-addict the jitters.

The novel merits mention in *Interzone* solely because it is set in the future, though not so as you’d notice. Thugs run riot through the streets of Britain, the police are unable or unwilling to deal with the situation, ordinary people are scared to venture out of their homes even in the daytime... So what else is new? Finally one man, Ivor Jones, having been mugged and assaulted in a busy shopping centre in broad daylight, decides to take a stand (though not before he’s had a couple of cuppas first). A lay preacher as charismatic as any televangelist, Jones establishes the Cromwell Movement, dedicated to restoring decency and order to our beleaguered nation. Pausing only to put the kettle on again, he gathers together an army of like-minded individuals and, using a combination of brute force and subtle media-manipulation, takes on the dealers and the carjackers and the joyriders and the ramraiders and the pimps and the petty thieves, and wins. It’s all reactionary wish-fulfilment garbage, *Death Wish* on a crudely exaggerated scale, and deserves to be shunned except as a text for future sociologists researching the tea-drinking habits of late-20th-century Britain.

It comes to something when the author’s brief biography in the press release that accompanies a review copy proves more interesting than the novel concerned. Born illegitimate, Roy Clews joined the Royal Marine Commandos at the age of 17, deserted from the Spanish Foreign Legion, and also served in the French Foreign Legion. Since getting married and settling down, he has earned a living writing women’s regional sagas under the pseudonym Sara Fraser. Regrettably, the image of a grizzled ex-soldier seated at his typewriter hacking out bodice-rippers, and no doubt consuming countless cups of tea along the way, lingers longer in the memory than anything to be found in *The Rise of Cromwell Jones*.

In the future, of course, good writers won’t be born – they’ll be gene-spliced. And with just a sprinkling of bucky-balls, a serious tea-habit will be easy to cure.

James Lovegrove

For a little over ten years now, Jonathan Carroll has been entertaining a selective and relatively small audience with his allegorical and often downright mysterious novels. These have been complemented, all too infrequently, by occasional short stories that are equally defiant of categorization but which are just as mesmerizing in their display of quiet truths skilfully told. Now, and not before time, 19 of these tales have been collected in one volume, *The Panic Hand* (HarperCollins, £14.99), which makes for a wonderful introduction to Carroll's longer work for those who have yet to experience his rare magic and a thoroughly enjoyable read for those already fortunate enough to know his style and his subjects. The fact is, however, Carroll has but one subject: a coming-to-terms with everyday life while side-stepping frequent interferences from the many capricious cosmic forces and powers that hold sway.

Although his work has been pigeonholed under "horror," Carroll is not so easily defined. Certainly, many of the genre's staples can be found in his stories but these are really more incidental than primary. Thus, in his tales here on Hell ("The Jane Fonda Room") and the threatening phone-call ("Tired Angel"), we learn more about human conditioning than we do of stygian depths or police procedures. And so it is with all of the stories in *The Panic Hand*.

In "Uh-Oh City," "The Sadness of Detail" and "The Life of My Crime" we meet emissaries from an increasingly weakening and confused deity who require strange undertakings from human beings but who, by way of trade, offer rare insights into the innermost workings not only of those they visit but also of the world in which they live.

A man who, having been told he is going blind, elects to have photographs taken of himself made up to all the ages he will become before he dies ("A Wheel in the Desert, the Moon on Some Swings"). In this way, as each decade passes – and long after his sight has failed entirely – he will be able to show these studies to people and ask them if this is the way he appears: their comparisons between the photographs and his actual appearance will thus enable him to form a mental picture of his true self at every stage of his life. All well and good – if slightly bizarre – until the photographer develops the photographs... and begins to wonder just where he was pointing his camera.

A man and woman (brother and sister) call at the house they grew up in and ask the present occupant if they can look around so as to recapture the happy times of their youth. However, both the visitors and the occupant discover that houses, too, have memories ("A Flash In The Pants").

And dotted around the book, in a quartet of quite superb stories that take

Quiet Truths

Peter Crowther

a close look at human needs and failings, Carroll introduces us to: a 32 year-old man who wakes up to find himself back in college ("Postgraduate"); a woman's imaginary childhood companion who, during an unexciting and unfulfilled middle age, returns to her life bearing gifts and friendship... but there is a price to pay ("Mr Fiddlehead"); a man with a dog who learns from his faithful companion of the animals' threat to take over the world ("Friend's Best Man"); and a young girl who creates a voluptuous escort to entertain a fellow passenger (and thus overcome her own shortcomings) on a long train journey ("The Panic Hand").

But perhaps the most memorable and poignant story of them all is the slight but powerful "The Fall Collection" in which a terminally-ill Casper Milquetoast character leaves his work and, for the last few months of his life, devotes himself to following the exciting world of men's fashion. Thus, and only just in time, does he discover the true definitions of wealth and humanity.

With Death, God, ghosts and fairy-tale characters in regular attendance, Carroll's very obvious affection for the fantastical may well have worked against him, with critics and literary pundits reluctant to evaluate his serious and often allegorical work against the wider yardsticks of contemporary mainstream fiction. If that is the case then it's a desperate shame. Carroll's use of the genre is merely as one might use a vehicle in order to get somewhere: it's the destination that counts and not the mode of transportation. To this end perhaps, one day, in some far-off retrospective anthology of great American literature, some of these stories may rub shoulders with those by Hemingway, Cheever, Malamud and Updike.

The Panic Hand is a rare entertainment indeed, a collection of stories that may be re-read repeatedly and which could – just possibly – change the way you think and feel about a few things.

In the hands of just any horror-writer the tale of a bunch of were-creatures terrorizing the community would be simply one more shlocky *Silver Bullet*-cum-*Wolfen*-cum-American *Werewolf in London* shtick. But, as (despite the disappointing *Raven*, his last novel) Charles L. Grant is not just any horror-writer, *Jackals* (NEL, £5.99) is a far cry from being yesterday's lycanthropic fare merely heated through.

That's not to say there's too much here that's new: in fact, far from it. Rather, it's Grant's poetically sombre and even elliptical style – coupled with a genu-

inely breathless pacing (no chapter breaks, just line-spaces here and there with some of the resulting mini-chapters being several pages and some being only several lines) – that carries the thing through into an area where even if it's not exactly art you can, at least, smell the paint. And it is quite a tale.

A badly-beaten woman staggers into Jim Scott's house and life with a tale of horror and deadly pursuit. Things have ambushed her on the road. Anyone else but Scott would have been incredulous but he knows all about the things she's referring to: he knows why they're here... and why they let the girl get away from them. They appear normal, they drive cars and eat in roadside diners, they "work" (a limited type of job which consists primarily of chasing, tearing and eating) just as well in the daylight as they do at night... and they want Jim Scott to know they've come back. For him.

Scott pulls together the usual collection of small-town heroes (at least as far as American horror fiction goes) that seem to account for a sizeable portion of the voting public over there and, figuring the best form of defence is still to attack, he sets out to turn the tables on the creatures. However – and this is what makes the book special – the girl is not all she initially seems and things don't go quite so smoothly (or predictably) as even the most jaded monster-yarn fan might fear.

Grant has been trading off Stephen King's "the premier horror writer of his or any generation" quote for longer than I would care to think and the output of recent years has weakened the sentiment considerably. But signs are that Charlie's got his second wind: certainly *Jackals* is a return to almost-top form and a vindication of the faith many of us have carried during the past few years.

After his excellent *Goodlow's Ghosts*, A. T. M. Wright's *Sleepeasy* (Gollancz, £4.99) – which again features the confused Sam Goodlow, still trying to come to terms with being dead – was something of a disappointment. And that in itself is disappointing. The (fairly thin) plot revolves around the sudden death of Harry Briggs and his wife Barbara – she slips on the iced-up diving board of their outside pool and he jumps in to save her – and of Harry's subsequent efforts to find her in a muddled afterlife which takes the form of a waterside community called Silver Lake.

In typical Wright style, the inhabitants of Silver Lake don't seem to know why they're there just as Harry (who, as a lifelong devotee of *film noir*, has adopted the vernacular of a down-at-heel shamus) is unable to rationalize why one minute he's diving into the pool – after his wife and the next he's driving around showing people her photograph and asking if they've seen her. Then into the community comes a Sydney Greenstreet lookalike, a creation of

Harry's subconscious, who is intent on murdering the townsfolk. (It later transpires that Silver Creek itself is a creation of Harry's wife's subconscious!)

Anyway, Sydney somehow drifts across the lake and back into the corporeal world where he carries on killing... with each of his victims suddenly appearing in Silver Lake and causing almost as much confusion as reading this review is undoubtedly causing you. Thus it falls to Harry and his out-of-

the-blue partner (Sam Goodlow, whose appearance is never quite explained) to return to the Living World to catch Sydney. Meanwhile, the jolly folk of Silver Creek discover their world is literally falling apart... being eaten away by some strange blackness which suggests that maybe there is death after death.

Despite some interesting metaphysical/existential conversations between Sam and Harry as to what constitutes death and life and what are a ghost's

limitations, the inevitable conclusion is that the author had other things on his mind (not least, perhaps, the fact that Sharon Stone is currently slated to play the lead in the movie adaptation of Wright's *A Manhattan Ghost Story*). Wright is still the undisputed master of the ghost story as an entertaining treatise on real possibilities, but this reads too much like a tongue-in-cheek textbook collaboration with Carlos Castenada.

Pete Crowther

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the act of observation affects that which is being observed. Although most celebrated for its seemingly perverse relevance to physics this problem is, of course, more acute in the human sciences (and most acute of all in the science of book reviewing). It is equally true, however – much to the chagrin of those miserable unbelievers who insist that there is no Balance in Nature – that the properties of whatever is being observed affect the process of observation.

One of the less well-known corollaries of the latter theorem is that there can be no such thing as a history of surrealism, because the world-view and methods of surrealism are such as to deny and defy all the notions which tacitly underpin the historical enterprise: objectivity, temporal linearity, accuracy of representation, etc, etc. In order to be true to its subject, a history of surrealism could not be formulated as a history at all; it would have to take the form of a peculiar and perverse, elusive and illusory, self-deluding and ultimately self-defeating work of art.

Exquisite Corpse by Robert Irwin (Dedalus, £14.99) is the second edition of a novel whose first edition was entirely fictitious, including new material which shows the contents of that imaginary first edition in an entirely new light (for whose illumination the imaginary readers of the original will doubtless be glad). Both stories track the misadventures of a young member of the Serapion Brotherhood, who helped to organize the First Surrealist Exhibition in England, was tragically disappointed in love, and had a Bad Time during and after World War II. Actual historical personages like Oliver Sorge and Jorge Arguelles here rub shoulders with fictitious beings strayed from some parallel universe, like Andre Breton and Herbert Read, who insist on debating such questions as the nature of art, the nature of reality and the possible relation of one to the other – but the reader's attention remains, of necessity, fixated upon the vexatious question of what can have happened to Caroline. I expect that most readers of the first edition guessed the answer to his enigma, and that most readers of the second edition will feel smug when the supplementary material assures them that they were

If Voltaire did not exist...

Brian Stableford

right, but that only goes to show how unreliable our impressions can be – which is, of course, what any accurate and objective history of surrealism (were any such thing possible) would probably be at pains to prove to us. A work of genius, probably.

Like readers of the first edition of *Exquisite Corpse*, readers of the early volumes of Anne Rice's "Vampire Chronicles" might well have supposed that their hero inhabited a conscientiously de-surrealized world, but *Memnoch the Devil* (Chatto & Windus, £15.99) demonstrates just how misleading appearances can be. Among the many classes of unreliable people there are in the world, lapsed Catholics are just about the least reliable of all; you never can tell when they might lapse back. Here Lestat, who has spent several hundred years learning that God and the Devil don't exist and that vampires have no need to fear Divine Judgment, discovers that God and the Devil do exist, and that Satan wants him for a sunbeam (well, actually he-who-is-really-called-Memnoch hates being called Satan and it never does become crystal clear what he wants Lestat for, but this is supposed to be a surreal book review, so what the hell.)

In the plot (I use the term loosely) of *Memnoch the Devil* the eponymous Adversary takes Lestat to Heaven, explains the entire history of the universe to him (including, of course, the Slight Difference of Opinion which writers like the man who claimed to be Enoch but wasn't understandably misinterpreted as a War in Heaven), whips him off to witness the crucifixion and pick up a precious sacred relic, explains the true and rather surprising nature and purpose of Hell, and finally lets him loose to save the world by precipitating a miraculous resurgence of the Catholic faith. Such is the ingratitude of religious men, however, that Anne

Rice is unlikely to get too many fan-letters from the Vatican, whose jealous hierarchy will doubtless consider her apologetic case for the Devil to be just a teensy-weensy bit heretical.

This performance is, in its way, utterly magnificent. Every true surrealist, every dyed-in-the-wool literary Satanist and every ex-Catholic determined to die before lapsing back (I shall modestly refrain from including a list of such worthies) will readily understand, however, that the subtle rhetoric underlying the narrative is actually diametrically opposed to its superficial claims. We readers, unlike poor Lestat, are supposed to be able to see that God is a vicious tyrant, absolutely corrupted by absolute power, and that Memnoch is his ignominious ape, and we are supposed to be worked up into a fever pitch of rebellious indignation by the farrago of sentimental pieties which stands in for a climax. At least, I hope we are. I was.

Which brings us back, by a process of admittedly arbitrary but not necessarily inapt juxtaposition, to the strange business of compiling histories of the unreal – or, to be strictly accurate (for a change), to *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror: Eighth Annual Collection* edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling (St Martin's Press, \$16.95), which is a monument to Herculean assiduity. The "summations" which preface the anthologies in this series have increased dramatically in length and breadth since the series began, to the point where they have become invaluable guides to the previous year's activities; no one with a serious interest in either genre can afford to be without the book. The only criticism which can be levelled at the project is that it has now become too big for its own good. The one thing that lets down the selection of stories is that the editors are forced to restrict their attention to short stories – unlike Gardner Dozois, whose annual *Year's Best Science Fiction* has the elbow-room required for him to slot in a reasonable sampling of novelettes and the occasional novella. Given that fantasy and horror are booming while science fiction continues to decline, there is no longer any sense in cramming the two broader genres into one volume; in future Datlow and Windling should have a book each.

Brian Stableford

SFX (£3 per issue, £36 for 14, monthly, A4, 108pp) edited by Matt Bielby and David Golder. *SFX Subscriptions*, Freepost (BS4900), Somerton, Somerset TA11.

SFX is known variously as "Adventures in Science Fiction" and "The Science Fiction Magazine." It doesn't feature fiction, and might be better thought of as the sf equivalent of *Q* or *Empire*, or a *Starburst* for grown-ups. The magazine's appearance improves from the garish issue one (Tank Girl and too much pink) to the at-least-it's-recognizably-sf issue 2 (Judge Dredd, hardware – and less pink). It covers every medium of sf – and if you haven't counted them recently, you might be surprised at how many there are: TV, films, animation, plays, comics, computer games, tarots, postage stamps, forgotten heroes (remember Steve Austin?), ludicrously expensive models of the *Enterprise*, and, would you believe it, books! Novelizations are generally allocated more review space than original works, but the overall coverage is actually pretty good. In addition, we are treated to a lengthy, in-depth and insightful interview with Iain M. Banks (issue 1) and Jeff Noon (issue 2), and regular features by John Grant and David Langford.

All in all, it's an exuberant, good-humoured, *fun* magazine, crammed with goodies. There's an underlying maturity there, too – witness the respect displayed towards the likes of Philip K. Dick, Larry Niven and Harlan Ellison. Recommended.

Beyond (£2.50 per issue, £14 for 6, £26 for 12, bimonthly, A4, 64pp) edited by David Riley. Cheques payable to *Beyond*, Parallel Universe Publications, 130 Union Road, Oswaldtwistle, Lancashire, BB5 3DR.

The new professional fiction magazine, *Beyond*, is two issues old at the time I write this. The line-up is quite impressive: there's a colour cover painting by David Hardy, an interview with David Gemmell and articles by Kim Newman, Ian Watson and Stephen Gallagher. The last of these offers advice to writers, drawing on his extensive experience. Of the fiction, there are a couple of very good stories by John Brunner and Charles M. Sapak... and six others. The overriding impression of the magazine is, unfortunately, largely down to those six, and that impression is best summed up as *lack-lustre*.

It's disappointing, not least because some of the authors have shown, elsewhere, that they can do much better. (One of them is Brian Stableford.) There's a sense that editor David Riley hasn't fully grasped the extent of his power – he is paying handsomely for stories, he can damned well tell his authors to work harder! For instance, he could tell Lyn McConchie that her potentially entertaining story might

From SFX to Scheherazade

British Magazine Reviews

Paul Beardsley



have worked if the "climax" wasn't followed by 400-plus words of wodgy explanation of why said climax happened – rewrite it please! Then again, some of the others are beyond salvage, especially the insipid Eternal Champion pastiche.

Despite this, the magazine deserves support – as does any sf magazine that appears in newsagents! It's early days yet, and I look forward to seeing considerable improvement in future issues.

Dark Asylum (£2.95 per issue, £16 for 6, £31 for 12, monthly, A4, 66pp) edited by Mansel Wetherell and Bianca Broderick. Ambiguous subscription form seems to imply you have to be a smoker to subscribe. Cheques payable to Nurse Ratchet, 119 Rodsley Ave, Shipcote, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear.

The most unprofessional-looking professional magazine I've seen is *Dark Asylum*. The colour cover for the May 1995 issue (by J. Hurst & Joe Broderick) is well executed (if not particularly imaginative); unfortunately, the lettering is of almost the same colour, making it very hard to read. There's an impression that someone went to a lot of trouble to make the interior as untidy as it is, with its mess of fonts, a missing photograph, and the magazine's logo clumsily inserted in an interview just before the closing word "do." Typos abound. The standard of English in the editorial and book reviews is embarrassing.

There's a ghost story by Ramsey Campbell called "The Previous Tenant," which isn't very involving. Adam Page at least makes an attempt at a subtle, oblique approach in his two stories.

Nisha Pannu provides the first of a six-partter called "Addicted." The other stories are run-of-the-mill horror, with scant regard for fresh ideas or character motivation.

On the non-fiction front, there's an article by Brian Stableford on vampires, which is very good. Oh, and I suppose I'd better mention the "joke" that runs through the magazine. The editors, right, pretend to be the doctors of the asylum, and there are lots of medical references – the letters page, for instance, is called "Outpatients." I wonder if they know how to stitch up split sides?

Night Dreams: Tales of the Weird, the Frightening, the Grotesque (£2.50 per issue, £9 for 4, v. infrequent, A4, 44pp) edited by Kirk S. King, 47 Stephens Road, Walmley, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands B76 2TS.

Night Dreams is now two issues old. It's been a very long time since issue 1.

This is how it is: Someone in the fourth form dorm managed to get hold of a story Nicholas Royle wrote when he was their age. After reading it, they take it in turns to try and scare each other with their own stories. (These draw heavily on hoary old Hammer Horror films – but who that age has seen them all?) Then, just as they've moved on to cracking "subversive" jokes ("I was a necrophiliac until some..." – well, it's funny when you're in the fourth form) the door to the dorm creaks open... There's a hushed silence! Could it be a vampire, or a werewolf, from one of their stories? Or – worse – a teacher?

No! It's Nicholas Royle!

"I shouldn't really be here," explains Mr Royle, "but I thought you'd prefer one of my grown-up stories!"

They do. So he reads it to them. And they all settle down to scary night dreams.

The end... or the beginning?

Scheherazade (£2.50 per issue, £8.50 for 4, quarterly, A5, 38pp) edited by Elizabeth Counihan, St Ives, Maypole Road, East Grinstead, West Sussex RH19 1HL.

Scheherazade benefits from having its own distinct identity, and an editor with instinctive taste. The stories in issue 11 are generally pretty good, especially "Aphrodite's Ring" by Brian Stableford (set in twin catacombs beneath 19th-century Paris), Lawrence Dyer's "Silica" (which evokes memories of Keith Roberts' work) and Paul Danesens "Beauty" (a fairy tale suitable for adults). What is remarkable about this selection is the manner in which the stories appear to work together, resulting in a multifaceted single entity. Perhaps I'm imagining it; perhaps it happened by chance. Whatever, the result is a thoroughly enjoyable issue.

Paul Beardsley

Books Received

June 1995

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the period specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

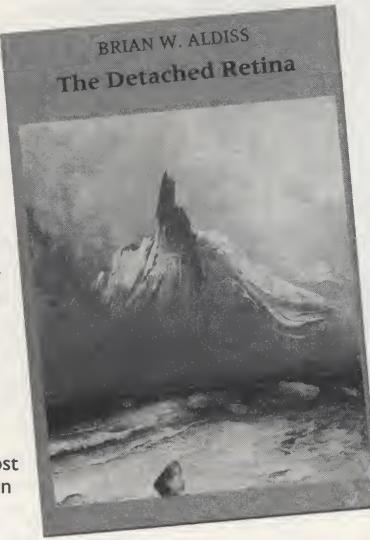
Aldiss, Brian. **The Detached Retina: Aspects of SF and Fantasy.** "Liverpool Science Fiction Texts and Studies." Liverpool University Press, ISBN 0-85323-299-7, x+224pp, trade paperback, £11.75. (Essay collection, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; this volume replaces Aldiss's two slim Serconia Press books, *The Pale Shadow of Science* [1985] and ...And the Glare of the Comet [1986]; however, he says "almost all the original articles have been greatly revised, thrown out, supplemented, or at least tampered with" and some "new articles have been added"; it's a wide-ranging, readable collection, covering such bases as the work of James Blish, Philip K. Dick, Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, Olaf Stapledon, Theodore Sturgeon, Mary Shelley and H. G. Wells.) States "April" on the review slip, but received in June 1995.

Andre-Driussi, Michael. **Lexicon Urthus: A Dictionary for the Urth Cycle.** Foreword by Gene Wolfe. Sirius Fiction [PO Box 460430, San Francisco, CA 94146, USA], ISBN 0-9642795-9-2, xvi+280pp, hardcover, \$39.95. (Illustrated alphabetical companion to Wolfe's *The Book of the New Sun* and pendant works, first edition; one of the charms of Wolfe's far-future sf masterpiece, as has often been remarked, is that it contained no made-up words; but there were plenty of rare ones, and here they're all explained; a nicely-produced and useful volume.) Late entry: 1994 publication, received in June 1995.

Anthony, Patricia. **Brother Termite.** New English Library, ISBN 0-340-61843-4, 250pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Warner, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) 20th July 1995.

Anthony, Piers. **Roc and a Hard Place.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-

85392-0, 319pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; proof copy received; latest in the "Xanth" series; it's possible this will be preceded by a British edition from Hodder & Stoughton [as the last "Xanth" novel was] but we haven't received a UK review copy yet.) October 1995.



Aylett, Steve. **Bigot Hall.** Serif [47 Strahan Rd., London, E3 5DA], ISBN 1-897959-20-6, 153pp, small-press paperback, cover by David Hine, £8.99. (Horror/fantasy [?] novel, first edition; a second book by the author of *The Crime Studio*, this is weird unclassifiable stuff: the publishers compare him to Hieronymous Bosch, P. G. Wodehouse and David Lynch; it's seemingly about a strange youth growing up in a strange household, so Iain Banks's *The Wasp Factory* might be a better point of reference.) 29th June 1995.

Barley, Michael. **Jackal Bird.** Tesseract Books [214-21, 10405 Jasper Ave., Edmonton, AB T5J 3S2, Canada], ISBN 1-895836-11-5, 298pp, hardcover, cover by Mitchell Stuart, Canadian \$21.95. (Sf novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous paperback edition [not seen]; a debut book by a new Canadian writer, born 1939; Spider Robinson commends it.) 1st June 1995.

Barnes, John. **Kaleidoscope Century.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-269-X, 252pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1995; the latest by the award-nominated American author of *A Million Open Doors* and *Mother of Storms*.) 19th June 1995.

Belle, Pamela. **The Silver City.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-32875-1, 496pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mike Posen, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1994.) 7th July 1995.

Belle, Pamela. **The Wolf Within.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-33734-3, 458pp, C-format paperback, cover by Mike Posen, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; sequel to *The Silver City*.) 7th July 1995.

Bennett, Warwick, and Patrick Hudson, eds. **Rutherford's Dreams: A New Zealand Science Fiction Collection.** IPL Books [PO Box 10-215, Wellington, New Zealand], ISBN 0-908876-87-4, 237pp, trade paperback, no price shown [£10 to British readers, including postage]. (Sf anthology, first edition; possibly the first-ever gathering of New Zealand sf, it contains stories by two writers who have appeared in *Interzone*, Phillip Mann and Peter Friend, plus many others by names largely unknown to us, including Mike Johnson, Lyn McConchie, Michael Morrissey, Vivienne Plumb, Elizabeth Smither, etc.) No date shown: received in June 1995.

Brin, David. **Brightness Reef: Book One of the Uplift Trilogy.** Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-89015-6, 513pp, hardcover, cover by Michael Whelan, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; another doorstop from Brin, it's a delayed follow-up to his popular early novels *Sundiver*, *Startide Rising* and *The Uplift War*.) October 1995.

Brin, David. **Otherness.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-310-7, 387pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £5.99. (Sf collection, first published in 1994; reviewed by Brian Stableford in *Interzone* 89.) 8th June 1995.

Calder, Richard. **Dead Girls.** St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-13045-7, 206pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1993 [not "1992" as it states inside]; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 75; St Martin's Press are presenting this as the first of a trilogy, which is news to us here in Britain, even though a follow-up, *Dead Boys*, did appear here recently.) 20th June 1995.

Card, Orson Scott. **Alvin Journeyman.** "The Tales of Alvin Maker IV." Tor, ISBN 0-312-85993-7, 382pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; this will cause pleasure in many quarters: the first new volume in six years, in what is widely perceived as Card's best series.) September 1995.

Cole, Allan, and Chris Bunch. **The Warrior's Tale.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38734-1, 471pp, A-format paperback, cover by Keith Parkinson, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, published in 1994; sequel to *The Far Kingdoms*; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 91.) 1st June 1995.

Curry, Chris. **Panic.** New English Library, ISBN 0-340-62299-7, 370pp, A-format paperback, cover by Melvyn Grant, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1994.) 20th July 1995.

Curry, Chris. **Thunder Road.** Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-64696-9, 439pp, hardcover, cover by Melvyn Grant, £16.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1995; this one is possibly sf, since it seems to have a UFOlogical theme, though presented in typical black-covered, multi-peopled, horror-suspense-thriller fashion.) 20th July 1995.

Dickson, John. **Pyrrhic Technology.** Minerva Press [10 Cromwell Place, London SW7 2JN], ISBN 1-85863-411-3, 223pp, small-press paperback, cover by Jenny Arthur, £7.99. (Sf novel, first edition; a debut book by a new British writer.) No date shown: received in June 1995.

Foster, Alan Dean. **Chorus Skating.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-313-1, 344pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mike Posen, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1994; latest in the "Spellsinger" series.) 8th June 1995.

Gay, Anne. **To Bathe in Lightning.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-314-X, 471pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Salwowski, £5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; sequel to *Dancing on the Volcano*.) 6th July 1995.

Goodkind, Terry. **Wizard's First Rule.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-246-0, 774pp, A-format paperback, cover by Doug

BOOKS REVIEWED AND RECEIVED

Beekman, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1994; Millennium have announced a 100,000-copy first print-run for this paperback edition [very large for Britain] and have produced a glossy publicity brochure to accompany it; presumably they believe they're on to a big seller here, perhaps the next David Eddings or Terry Brooks [having the first name "Terry" probably helps]; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 90.) 23rd October 1995.

Haining, Peter, ed. **The Vampire Omnibus**. Orion, ISBN 1-85797-694-0, ix+496pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror anthology, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; there have been many vampire anthologies before now, and they all seem to contain John Polidori's "The Vampyre" and Bram Stoker's "Dracula's Guest" — but luckily this one doesn't: Haining has made an effort to be original, and has included rare 19th-century material as well as extracts from movie novelizations, such as the late Paul Monette's *Nosferatu* [from Werner Herzog's film]; other writers represented include Woody Allen, Ray Bradbury, Alexandre Dumas, Julian Hawthorne, Henry Kuttner, Gustav Meyrink, Frank Norris, Simon Raven, Anne Rice, J. M. Rymer, Jimmy Sangster, Clive Sinclair, Theodore Sturgeon, Eugene Sue and Roger Zelazny.) June (?) 1995.

Herbert, James. **The Ghosts of Sleath**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-647597-3, 409pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1994; reviewed by James Lovegrove in *Interzone* 96; according to the blurb inside, Herbert's books "have sold more than 36 million copies worldwide" — considerably more than Terry Pratchett, but still a long way to go before he matches the 685 million copies of his American friend Harold Robbins [as reported in the *Guinness Book of Records*].) 12th June 1995.

Jefferies, Mike. **The Knights of Cawdor**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-648031-4, 381pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; it appears to be a follow-up to his "Loremasters of Elundium" trilogy; it says "Gorgeous imagination — *Interzone*" on the front cover; we've checked out Wendy Bradley's review of Jefferies's *Stone Angels* in *IZ* 80: what she actually said was "glorious imagination" — and we think she meant it a teensy bit ironically; ah, well.) 10th July 1995.

Kearney, Paul. **Riding the Unicorn**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05919-2, 254pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris

Brown, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1994.) 29th June 1995.

Kerr, Katharine. **A Time of Justice: Days of Air and Darkness**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-647859-X, xi+465pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1994; fourth in the "Time of..." sub-series of "Deverry" novels.) 19th June 1995.

Kilian, Crawford. **Redmagic**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38370-2, 307pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Harrison, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; Kilian, a Canadian-based [though New York-born] writer, has previously specialized in sf; this appears to be his second fantasy, following another novel called *Greenmagic* which we did not see.) 1st June 1995.

King, Stephen. **Insomnia**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-60848-4, 760pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1994; reviewed by Pete Crowther in *Interzone* 90.) 6th July 1995.

Komatsu, Sakyō. **Japan Sinks**. Translated by Michael Gallagher. Kodansha International, ISBN 4-7700-2039-2, 238pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in Japan, 1973; this English translation first appeared in the USA, 1976; a famous disaster epic in Japan, it sold three million copies there and was filmed; this edition has a new two-page "Note from the Author" in which he talks about the relevance of his novel in the light of recent earthquake disasters; an attractive paperback, it's available from Kodansha Europe Ltd at their British address [95 Aldwych, London WC2B 4JF] and is also released in the USA at \$9.95.) August 1995.

Kress, Nancy. **Beggars in Spain**. Roc, ISBN 0-45-118554-4, 438pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1993; proof copy received; the novella from which it's expanded won both Hugo and Nebula awards in its year.) 7th September 1995.

Laymon, Richard. **Island**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-1510-3, 346pp, hardcover, cover by Steve Crisp, £16.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA [?], 1995; Headline have long been in the habit of publishing world-first editions of their American horror favourites such as Koontz and Laymon; since this is an important selling point for collectors, we wish they'd make it explicit — and then we could drop the question marks in square brackets, as above.) 27th July 1995.

Lee, Tanith. **Gold Unicorn**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-301-8, 179pp, A-format paperback, cover by Dave Pether, £4.99. (Young-adult fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1994; sequel to *Black Unicorn*.) 8th June 1995.

Little, Bentley. **Dark Dominion**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0817-4, 345pp, hardcover, cover by Simon Dewey, £16.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA [?], 1995; Headline seem to be grooming Bentley Little as their latest Koontz clone [the previous one being Richard Laymon], but does the public still want these endless look-alike novels with the words "Dark" or "Night" in the title? — maybe so.) 27th July 1995.

Little, Bentley. **Night School**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-4195-3, 504pp, A-format paperback, cover by Simon Dewey, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1994.) 27th July 1995.

McAuley, Paul J. **Fairyland**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06070-0, 336pp, hardcover, cover by Steve Crisp, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous C-format paperback edition [not seen].) 17th August 1995.

McCaffrey, Anne, and Elizabeth Ann Scarborough. **Power Lines**. "Continuing the mysterious Chronicles of Petaybee — begun in *Powers That Be*." Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14099-6, 380pp, A-format paperback, cover by Peter Elson, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994.) 6th July 1995.

McDonald, Ian. **Necrovile**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-06004-2, 317pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Brown, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1994; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 89.) 27th July 1995.

Modesitt, L. E., Jr. **The Magic Engineer**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-272-0, 759pp, A-format paperback, cover by Darrell K. Sweet, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1994; third in the series that began with *The Magic of Reduce*; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 86.) 6th July 1995.

Moorcock, Michael. **Von Bek**. "The Tale of the Eternal Champion, Vol. I." Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-436-6, 646pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Reeve, £5.99. (Fantasy omnibus, first published in 1992; it contains *The Warhound and the World's Pain* [1981], *The City in the Autumn Stars* [1986] and "The Pleasure Garden of Felipe Sagittarius" [1965] plus a short

preface by the author.) 5th June 1995.

Nichols, Adam. **The War of the Lords Veil**. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-256-8, 372pp, A-format paperback, cover by Kenson Low, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1994; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 95.) 3rd July 1995.

Niven, Larry. **Flatlander**. "The Collected Tales of Gil 'The Arm' Hamilton." Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-39480-1, 360pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, \$5.99. (Sf/mystery collection, first edition; yet more old Niven repackaged, it contains the novelettes "Death by Ecstasy," "The Defenseless Dead" and "ARM" plus the short novel "Patchwork Girl" and a substantial story called "The Woman in Del Rey Crater" which appears to be new; there's also an afterword by the author.) 1st June 1995.

On Spec Editorial Collective, The. **On Spec: The First Five Years**. Tesseract Books [214-21, 10405 Jasper Ave., Edmonton, AB T5J 3S2, Canada], ISBN 1-895836-08-5, 255pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve and Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk, Canadian \$7.95. (Sf/fantasy anthology, first edition; contains reprinted stories by Robert J. Sawyer and ... umm ... they haven't exactly gone in for world-renowned Canadian names here: James Alan Gardner, Eileen Kernaghan, Alice Major, Karl Schroeder and many others, all first published in the Canadian small-press quarterly *On Spec*.) 1st June 1995.

O(rphan) D(rift>). **Cyber Positive**. [Or possibly it's O(rphan) D(rift>) by Cyber Positive.] Cabinet Editions [429 Colharbour Lane, London SW9 8LL], ISBN 0-952-58240-6, 436pp, small-press paperback, £9.99. (Sf novel [?], first edition; the most uncompromisingly "experimental" fiction we've seen in many a long year, slightly reminiscent of Alan Burns's *Dreamerika*! [if anyone remembers that from 20-odd years ago], this seems to be inspired in part by Burroughs, Ballard and the Cyberpunks, most of whom are quoted, cut-up fashion; many passages seem to be complete gibberish; it may be a collective work, and the prime perpetrator may or may not be one Nick Land — he's advertised in accompanying publicity as doing a reading; a puzzler: nothing is clear, which is probably the intention.) June 1995.

Palmer, Warren James. **Minds of the Empire: Book One of The Dyason**. Ripping Publishing [PO Box 286, Epsom, Surrey

KT19 9YG], ISBN 1-899884-9, 423pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first edition; a self-published debut novel by a new British author, born 1965; although a small-press publication, it's a proper, professionally-printed, A-format paperback; it's set in the 21st century, on an Earth which has been invaded by aliens, and the author, who says he was raised on Enid Blyton, Biggles and Star Trek, describes it as an unpretentious "ripping yarn.") June 1995.

Petersen, D. J. **The Apprentice**. Minerva Press [10 Cromwell Place, London SW7 2JN], ISBN 1-85863-340-0, 260pp, small-press paperback, £7.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; we're told nothing about the author, but this is possibly a debut book by a new British writer.) No date shown: received in June 1995.

Pratchett, Terry. **Maskerade**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05808-0, 285pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; the 17th "Discworld" novel, starring Granny Weatherwax and co., and with echoes of *The Phantom of the Opera* and the present-day publishing scene — it features a bookseller who "dreamed the dream of all those who publish books, which was to have so much gold in your pockets that you would have to employ two people just to hold your trousers up.") 2nd November 1995.

Pratchett, Terry, and Stephen Briggs. **The Discworld Companion**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06002-6, 288pp, B-format paperback, cover by Josh Kirby, £6.99. (Alphabetical who's who and what's what of Pratchett's humorous fantasy series, first published in 1994; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 92; the copyright date has been amended to "1994, 1995" — which suggests it may have been updated or corrected, though no changes are easily discernible.) 20th July 1995.

Priest, Christopher. **The Prestige**. Simon & Schuster/Touchstone, ISBN 0-671-71924-6, 439pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Fantasy [?] novel, first edition; proof copy received; Priest's first new novel in five years, an extract appears in this issue of *Interzone* — but don't be misled by the apparent nature of that piece: this is not "steampunk sf," nor fantasy in the usual sense, but rather the author's characteristic blend of mystery, illusion and reality; the publishers are entering this novel for the Booker Prize, where perhaps it will be up against Martin Amis's recent opus with the curiously

Priest title, *The Information*.) 25th September 1995.

Rodgers, Alan. **Pandora**. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-248-7, 344pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA [?], 1995; Rodgers has a reputation as a horror writer, but this one is labelled sf; like Chris Curry's new novel, above, it seems to be a UFO novel.) 5th June 1995.

Rusch, Kristine Kathryn. **Alien Influences**. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-249-5, 424pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1994; this one is apparently not out yet in her homeland, the USA.) 5th June 1995.

Saul, John. **Black Lightning**. Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-03758-8, 331pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1995.) 10th August 1995.

Saul, John. **The Homing**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40859-3, 414pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1994; a John Saul Fan Club is advertised in the rear: PO Box 17035, Seattle, WA 98107, USA; the accompanying publicity sheet tells us that "over 18 million copies of his books are in print worldwide.") 10th August 1995.

Sawyer, Robert J. **Foreigner: The Quintaglio Ascension**, 3. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-61804-3, 285pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mick Posen, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994.) 20th July 1995.

Scott, Michael. **The Hallows**. Signet/Creed, ISBN 0-45-118379-7, 354pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bill Gregory, £4.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first edition.) 29th June 1995.

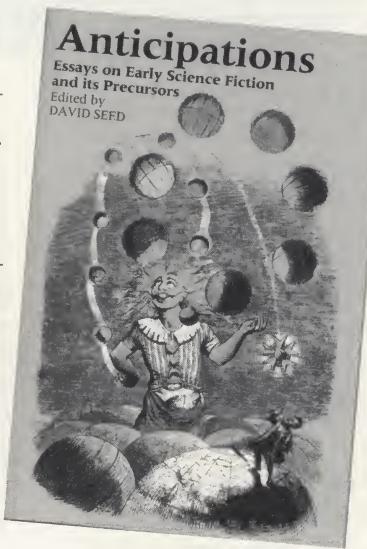
Seed, David, ed. **Anticipations: Essays on Early Science Fiction and Its Precursors**. "Liverpool Science Fiction Texts and Studies." Liverpool University Press, ISBN 0-85323-418-3, xvi+225pp, trade paperback, £12.25. (Critical essay anthology, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; probably the most academically interesting of the volumes in the Liverpool series so far, this contains solid pieces by Edward James, Patrick Parrinder, Brian Stableford and others less well known on 18th, 19th and early 20th-century sf, ranging from Paltock's Peter Wilkins to Gilman's *Herland*.) States "April" on the review slip, but received in June 1995.

Sheffield, Charles, ed. **How to Save the World**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85577-X, 349pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf anthology, first edition; proof copy received; all-new "technofix" stories by Doug Beason, James P. Hogan, Kathe Koja & Barry Malzberg, Geoffrey A. Landis, Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle, Mary Turzillo, Lawrence Watt-Evans and others; and, best of all, there's no mention of Martin H. Greenberg anywhere — it looks as though Sheffield really has edited this himself.) September 1995.

Silva, David B. **The Disappeared**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-1300-3, 279pp, hardcover, cover by Bob Corley, £16.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA [?], 1995; yet more Koontzery.) 27th July 1995.

Simmons, Dan. **Fires of Eden**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-5005-7, 503pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1994; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 96.) 27th July 1995.

Smith, Stephanie A. **Other Nature**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85638-5, 253pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a first sf novel by an author who has previously written two fantasies, *Snow-Eyes* and *The Boy Who Was Thrown Away*; she comes with praise from people like Ursula Le Guin and Paul Park, who should know.) October 1995.



Somtow, S. P. **Vanitas: Escape from Vampire Junction**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05655-X, 352pp, hardcover, cover by Max Schindler, £16.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA [?], 1995.) 27th July 1995.

Stasheff, Christopher. **A Wizard in War**. "The Third Chronicle of the Rogue Wizard."

Tor, ISBN 0-312-85696-2, 222pp, hardcover, \$20.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) November 1995.

Sterling, Bruce. **Heavy Weather**. Phoenix, ISBN 1-85799-299-7, 280pp, B-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 95.) 3rd July 1995.

Turtledove, Harry. **Worldwar: Tilting the Balance**. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-64899-6, 482pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Alternative-history sf novel, first published in 1995; sequel to *Worldwar: In the Balance*.) 20th July 1995.

Vira, Soma. **Nikita's Shadows: Book Three in the Series** **Planet Keepers**. Carlton Press [11 West 32nd St., New York, NY 10001, USA], ISBN 0-8062-4973-0, 229pp, hardcover, \$15.95. (Sf novel, first edition [?]; although published in New York, this has the characteristic "feel" of an Indian book, so possibly it's an American edition of a work first published in the sub-continent; the author was born in Lucknow but lives in the USA; she is the author of several other novels, presumably published mainly for the Indian market.) Late entry: 1994 publication, received in June 1995.

Vardeman, Robert E., and Geo. W. Proctor. **Swords of Raemlyn: Book 3**. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-61774-8, 600pp, B-format paperback, cover by Paul Davies, £6.99. (Fantasy omnibus, first edition [?]; it contains three novels, *Blade of the Conqueror*, *The Tombs of A'bre* and *The Jewels of Life*, all of which appear to have been first published in the USA, 1995.) 20th July 1995.

Williams, Walter Jon. **Rock of Ages**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85963-5, 287pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; third in his humorous "Drake Majistral" sequence, which began in the 1980s with *The Crown Jewels* and *House of Shards*.) September 1995.

Wurts, Janny. **The Ships of Merior: The Wars of Light and Shadow, Volume 2**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21070-9, 740pp, A-format paperback, cover by Janny Wurts, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1994.) June (?) 1995.

Wylie, Jonathan. **Other Lands**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-309-3, 360pp, hardcover, cover by Keith Scaife, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 8th June 1995.

CHRIS GILMORE doesn't just review... Have you a manuscript that needs just that little extra polish to be published? I offer honest opinions and expert attention at reasonable rates. Ring or write: 6c St Michael's Road, Bedford MK40 2LT; (01234) 346142.

AC3: A SPACE EXPLORATION

NOVEL by Stanley Oliver, published USA (1992), rec. UK price £14. Only just available here, direct from author. Hardback, 261 pages (16 by 23 cm). A crew of 200 reach our nearest star system and unexpected captivity. Unrepeatable bargain price £5.50 (post free). Send to: 37 Duchy Avenue, Paignton, Devon TQ3 1ER.

SF NEWS, REVIEWS and much more: *Science Fiction Chronicle*, the monthly American and British sf/fantasy news magazine, Hugo-winner, air-mailed direct from the USA to you for £25 yearly. Sample £3. Algol Press, c/o Ethel Lindsay, 69 Barry Road, Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7QQ.

THREADS #7: the latest SF from Tim Veal, Caroline Dunford, Rod Slatter, Dominic McDonagh, David Blair & Hugo Dell. Fantasy from Katherine Roberts, Willie Meikle & Colin P. Davies. Artwork: Russell Morgan. £2.50. Lynsoft, 32 Irvin Avenue, Saltburn, Cleveland TS12 1QH.

BOOKSEARCH. No fee, no obligation. Send your "wants lists," or SAE for further details. Hudson-Dale Books, 7 Newfield Crescent, Dore, Sheffield S17 3DE.

FOR SALE: SF/F, horror, mysteries, etc. Books, magazines, comics. Thousands. Free search. Buying, trading. Write: JS, 1500 Main Avenue, Kaukauna, WI 54130, USA.

HARM'S WAY – "What if Charles Dickens had written a space opera?" (*Locus*) – large paperback, £3.50. *The Hour of the Thin Ox* and *Other Voices*, paperbacks, £1.50 each. Prices include postage. Colin Greenland, 2a Ortygia House, 6 Lower Road, Harrow, Middx. HA2 0DA.

SMALL ADS

CRITICAL ASSEMBLY I & II:

both volumes of Hugo-winner David Langford's legendary sf review columns. All revised/reset; each volume 70,000 words softbound. Each £9.75 post free from David Langford, 94 London Rd., Reading RG1 5AU (e-mail ansible@cix.compulink.co.uk).

"SCHEHERAZADE 9 WAS A DELIGHT," said Gene Wolfe. "Very much a reader's magazine. Recommended for fireside reading," said *Interzone*. The best in fantasy and SF are here to stay! Issue 11 includes stories by Brian Stableford and Lawrence Dyer, and masterly illustrations by Noel Bateman, Brian Combe and Margaret Theakston. Available from Scheherazade, St Ives, Maypole Road, East Grinstead RH19 1HL. £7.50 (£8.50 overseas) for four-issue subscription; £1.99 (£2.30 overseas) for a single issue. Cheques (sterling only) payable to Scheherazade. Subscribe now before price rise.

THE THIRD ALTERNATIVE: the best fantasy you've had in years. Issue 7 out now. Sixty glossy pages, stunning artwork, ten brilliant stories by Tim Nickels, Steve Antczak, Gwyneth Hughes, Chris Kenworthy, Mat Coward, etc. £2.50 (£9 for four). Writers: you need ZENE, the definitive guide to independent literary markets worldwide. Contributors' guidelines, reviews, news, articles, interviews. Professional production, highly recommended. £1.95 (£7 for four). **SPECIAL OFFER:** subscription to both magazines £14. All cheques payable to "Zene," 5 Martins Lane, Witcham, Ely, Cambs. CB6 2LB.

SECOND LIST of used and out-of-print mass-market paperbacks. SF&F, Authors/Editors H-Z, some 600 titles. F(M)L, PO Box 23, Upwell, Cambs. PE14 9BU.

"VERY IMPRESSED" – "really exceptionally good" – "nicely readable and varied." Some of the responses to issue 1 of Paul Beardsley's *Substance* magazine, featuring Stephen Baxter, Ben Jeapes and Lannah Battley. £9 for a four-issue subscription or £2.50 for a single issue, cheques payable to Neville Barnes at 65 Conbar Avenue, Rustington, West Sussex BN16 3LZ.

SF, HORROR books & magazines for sale. SAE to Richard Underwood, 16 Admaston Road, Wellington, Telford, Shropshire TF1 3NE.

DAY FOR WRITERS: October 7 1995, Northbrook College, Durrington Site, Worthing. £26 inc. lunch. Simon Brett, Wendy Perriam — Novels, Radio, TV. Bob Shaw — SF & Fantasy. Also Writing for Magazines, Children, Mass Market Fiction, From Your Own Experience, Poetry. Competitions. SAE for brochure: A Garner, 225 Brighton Road, Worthing, W. Sussex BN11 2EY. Tel.: 01903 201923.

BRIGHTON AREA readers of *Interzone* are welcome to join us on Friday nights at The Mitre, a friendly pub on Baker Street (near the Open Market). A few of us meet from 9-11pm, in the smaller of the two rooms, for informal drink and chat. You'll recognize us by the copies of IZ or other sf publications lying around — so come along and make yourselves known. (Editors.)

SMALL ADS in *Interzone* reach over 10,000 people. If you wish to advertise please send your ad copy, together with payment, to *Interzone*, 217 Preston Drove, Brighton BN1 6FL, UK. Rates: 25 pence per word, minimum of ten words, discount of 10% for insertions repeated in three issues (VAT is inclusive).

COMING NEXT MONTH

Our landmark 100th issue. New fiction by Stephen Baxter & Eric Brown (their first collaboration), Molly Brown, Greg Egan, Ian McDonald and Geoff Ryman – illustrated throughout by SMS. Plus all our usual features and reviews. So look out for the October 1995 *Interzone*, number 100, on sale in September.



Tales of Adventure from the Rimworld
PATRICK TILLEY.

STAR WARTZ

*Tales of Adventure from
the Rimworld*

PATRICK TILLEY

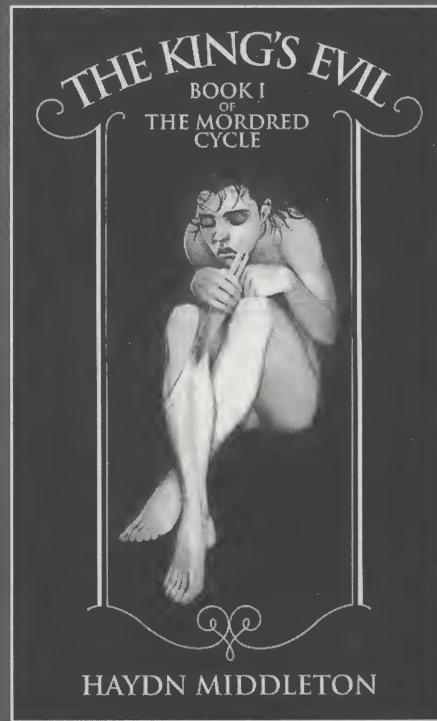
The irreverently inventive new
adventure epic from the
acclaimed author of

AND NEW IN LITTLE, BROWN HARDBACK

The KING'S EVIL

HAYDN MIDDLETON

Book One of
The Mordred Cycle -
a stunning new view of
Arthurian legend



ORBIT is an imprint of Little, Brown & Company (UK)
1994 PUBLISHER OF THE YEAR

O

R

B

I

T

FROM THE WORLD'S GREATEST SCIENCE FICTION WRITER

GREG BEAR



A MAGNIFICENT RETURN TO THE UNIVERSE OF EON

LEGACY

Now available in hardback from all good bookshops

